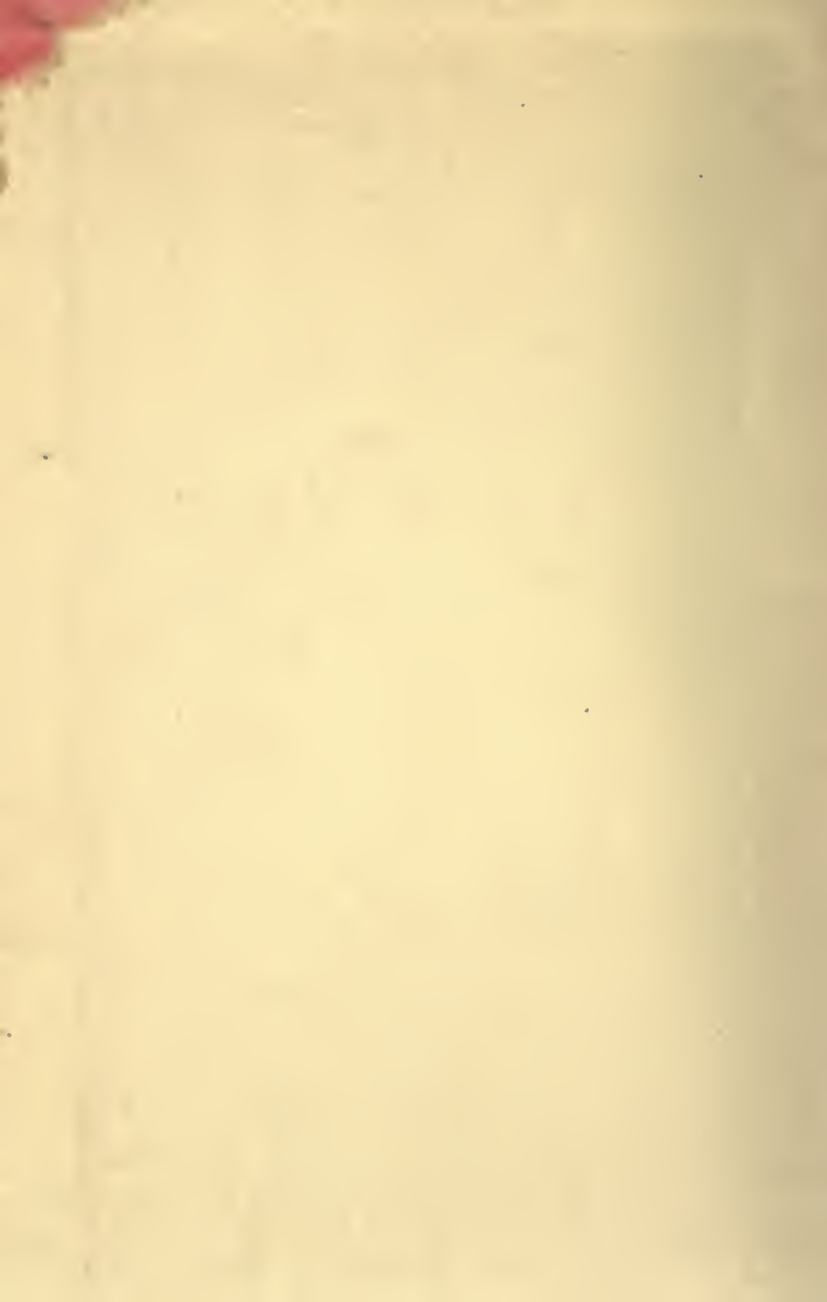


The
MAN
WHO
REAPS

by
KATHARINE
JONES



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THE MAN WHO REAPS

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A STORY

By
KATHARINE JONES



New York
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THE MAN WHO REAPS

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER

A YOUNG man leaned upon the railing of an incoming Atlantic steamer, watching with keen relish the picturesque confusion of an English harbor. He had a tall, well-knit frame, and the color of much living in the open air. He nodded a careless greeting to a man, somewhat older, who strolled up, and took a place beside him.

"Well, Henshaw, the land looks good, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I hate these beastly voyages," growled the older man. "I envy you, Kent, seeing all this for the first time."

The young man laughed good-humoredly, and continued to watch the slow discharge of passengers.

"It's a double stroke of luck to see it with Ned Aveling," he remarked.

As the name left Kent's lips, Henshaw threw a piercing glance at him. But Kent did not seem to notice; his eyes were on the shifting crowd. Henshaw drew nearer, and leaned upon the railing.

“So you are visiting Ned Aveling. Have you—seen him, lately?”

A shade of annoyance crossed Kent's face, as he replied shortly, “Not since he left America.”

“Hm. That was some months ago.”

“Yes—six months.”

Henshaw's face curiously softened, and, after a keen survey of the younger man, he turned his gaze to the crowd gathered upon the dock. Something there caught his attention. His heavy features sharpened as he pushed slightly forward, for a moment's eager inspection. “I have heard that Aveling is quite changed,” he said, with a quick, in-drawn breath, his eyes fixed intently upon some object in the throng.

Kent made an impatient movement. “Nonsense!” he exclaimed. “Ned Aveling won't lose his balance because a chateau and fortune chance to cross his path.”

Henshaw shifted his position. “Still, it would not be unreasonable to look for some difference in the man, after that amazing luck of his. Aveling's mad-cap pranks *would* be a little out of order in an English manor-house,” he said absently, as if mentally filling a gap in his thoughts.

A spark of anger shot from Kent's eye. “Now see here, Henshaw, you know I've got a temper, and it won't stand more than a reasonable strain. Aveling is an old friend of mine. I know him like

a book, and all this talk about his being changed is flat nonsense. A man *will* grow up in time, and why the gossips fall upon him because he doesn't jig through history wearing the cap and bells, puzzles the understanding of your ordinary citizen like me."

Henshaw let the heated words pass, and waited a moment before replying.

"I never knew Aveling well in America," he went on, in a quiet tone. "But when I met him over here it was hard to believe the tales I have heard of his younger days. Was he as wild as the stories make him?"

The smothered wrath faded from Kent's face.

"Oh, Aveling had the most infectious joy in living. His doings are classic on the campus," he said, relaxing in a stream of happy recollections. "He was the inspiration of every graceless prank pulled off in his college days. I think he must have spent a good half of his time racing about with explanations. It was the treat of my life to see him sail in to expound the harmless nature of his antics. He could thaw the stiffest duenna by some marvellous spell he put into his lightest word. No one could resist him. He had the most intoxicating smile, the most fascinating impudence."

Kent was carried away by the force of his own thoughts, and seemed to see beyond the strange

scene before him to another day, full of vital memories. Henshaw was a curious study as he broke across this dreaming mood. He pointed downward to a figure standing near the gang-plank. "Kent, do you know that man?" he asked in a sharp, incisive tone.

Kent, fresh from his recollections, stared down for a moment, and then shook his head. "No, never saw him before."

"Odd looking person," Henshaw ventured, with a quick look at Kent, upon whom the incident made no apparent impression. Nothing more was said, until Henshaw, muttering something about the thinning trail of passengers that left the ship, started off with a hasty good-bye, to Kent's evident surprise.

"Won't you wait, and meet Aveling?" said Kent. "He'll be here, somewhere."

"Thank you, no," stammered Henshaw. "I'm in a hurry. I've something rather urgent to see to," and he hastened away. At a little distance, he paused, looked with musing pity at Kent, and then, shaking his head, disappeared below.

The young man showed some irritation at Henshaw's odd manœuvres, which he pretended not to see, and fell to studying the kaleidoscopic movements of the crowd, and finally the figure Henshaw had pointed out. The man stood motionless near the gang-plank, giving close attention to the

stream of people going by. Kent's eye returned to him from time to time with a growing sense of uneasiness. There was something disagreeable about him, some hint of death and gloom, and as Kent watched he felt a kind of spell creep over him that drugged his senses. He roused himself, with some astonishment, scanning the melancholy stranger more closely. A greater contrast to the merry figure he lately had in mind could scarcely be offered. He was eminently English, but something in the lean figure caused the man upon the deck to grow thoughtful, his mind brought to sharp focus upon the spectacle surging across the docks. The sense of two merging worlds was curiously symbolized by that motionless figure; he surveyed the crowd with the deportment of an English gentleman, but his spare form was unmistakably American.

With a gasp of horror, Kent caught a deeper meaning. For all at once, the valley which the stranger's melancholy spanned lay between the brilliant world of the senses, upon which Kent gazed, and the isolation of some experience not given to the common lot. The man stood as detached and unreal as a ghost in a throng of living beings.

Kent stared on, unable to disentangle his crowding impressions, for the uncanny figure began to lure him. Some one stirred below on the dock,

and caught his eye. Henshaw was moving away, with a hastily averted face. Kent sprang up, muttering a wrathful exclamation, and shook his long, lithe limbs, which ached with a curious cramp. He leaned over the railing to look once more at the sombre stranger, and again his limbs were caught in a numbing thrall. He wrenched his attention loose, with a curious feeling of alarm, and a belated gratitude to Henshaw as he shook off the mesmeric spell of the silent figure waiting below.

“Heavenly powers!” he muttered, “but it will be good to see Ned, after that ghostly sight.”

He began to think it strange he had not seen Aveling, and kept a sharp look-out for the high-held head and dashing figure, which were not easy to overlook, even in a crowd. But he was nowhere to be seen. Kent stopped, when he left the gang-plank, and looked about. Some one touched his shoulder. “Well—you’re a sight for the gods and all!”

Kent turned about, and then brought to a halt in stunned amazement. It was Aveling’s voice, no doubt, but it issued from the gloomy Englishman whom he had seen standing at the ship’s side!

CHAPTER II

THE FACE OF STONE

THEY gripped hands in silent man-fashion, Kent wincing at the bony clutch. What awful thing had happened Aveling? He was not merely altered, he was another man. Kent could not believe his senses, until presently there came a smile about the set mouth which assured him that beyond question this changed flesh was Ned Aveling.

"Let's get out of this crowd," Kent heard him say, as, with an abrupt movement, he led the way to where his wife waited, the graceful beauty Kent had seen last in her bridal veil. He thought she looked wan and wistful, and was startled to see something like relief leap out of her great, gray eyes, as their hands met.

Aveling went off to see about Kent's luggage, leaving him in Mrs. Aveling's company, trying to fight off that odd feeling of melancholy, or depression, or whatever it was that had settled about him with the first sight of Aveling's face. There was just a touch of restraint in Mrs. Aveling's manner, something totally at variance with the graceful welcome she had given him, and the easy

flow of talk that left her lips. He noticed a furtive apprehension in the look she directed at Aveling, on his return, and a disagreeable thought crossed his mind that she might be unhappy. But it seemed impossible. Their courtship had been unusually serene and full of joy. He dismissed the surmise from his mind, but the oddness of it all stung him into a closer observation of Aveling's stern pallor, and moody abstraction. Perhaps the change of climate did not agree with him. An impulse to inquire more closely about his health sprang to Kent's lips several times, to be checked by the unaccountable reluctance which seemed to direct Mrs. Aveling's movements, for he noticed that she forebore the slightest contradiction of Aveling's speech, or the smallest interruption of his moods.

"How soon shall we start, Ned?" she asked, with a discernible tremor in her voice.

"We are not leaving," he said harshly. "We will spend the night in Liverpool."

She said nothing more, but her acquiescence contained a hint that she knew of no reason for staying there, and Aveling volunteered no further information. They went immediately to the hotel, where they passed the evening in quiet talk, and retired early.

Kent was more mystified than he cared to think, and doggedly set himself to accept events without

question. But a disconcerting memory kept before his mind the contents of Aveling's last letter, which distinctly said they would go at once to Roxmoor, Aveling's ancestral home, and travel through the country later. And now he had chosen, without any apparent reason, to loiter in smoky Liverpool. What further caprice might direct his movements, Kent could not even imagine; he was dealing with a person he did not know.

With a resolute effort of the will, he put it all aside, and in the morning sauntered down to breakfast in his usual, genial humor, listening with impassive calm when Aveling gave out that they would go on to Chester.

"Shall we stay there over night?" his wife casually asked.

"How can I tell!" he exclaimed irritably. "Kent might enjoy a longer stay. There is no reason to rush violently about. It seems to me you are in a great hurry to get to Roxmoor, Aline."

For just a moment, her self-control failed, and over her face there rushed a look of horror. Kent watched, every sense alert. Did she dread the splendor of Aveling's ancient home? He got no further light, for she instantly rallied, and quietly replied, "Why, dear, I am in no hurry. I was wondering how to pack my small belongings. I

am a terrible person, Mr. Kent. I can't pack a pocket-handkerchief without an hour's notice."

"Oh, Aline needs a caravan to so much as cross the county," remarked her husband, his gloom lifting. He was presently heard to remark, in a mollified tone, that Kent might as well see the sights on the way, which was plausible and pleasant, except for the slight hesitation of his manner, and the elaborate explanation for things which did not need to be explained.

Against his will, the discomfort of some premonition began to invade Kent's mind, as they loitered in easy fashion on the way to Roxmoor. The transformation in his old college chum gathered startling force, as Aveling grew used to Kent's daily presence, and fell into his usual habits. He was not older, but different; his merry laughing spirits were struck down. Kent's thoughts gathered about the subject with deep misgiving, for he noticed that these moods increased in rigor as they approached Roxmoor, and reluctantly he began to see that whatever had quenched Aveling's bright spirits, it had some close relation to his change of fortune. Aveling seemed actually to fear the return to the castle. Kent could only infer that it brought the recurrence of some experience to be dreaded, or perhaps an increase of the habitual gloom which replaced his youthful gayety.

A few days' travel brought them to the station where the Roxmoor carriage waited for them. Aveling had become almost harsh as he stood aside to let his wife and Kent pass into the carriage. Then he followed, and fell into utter silence.

There was a nipping rawness in the air, which grew sharper as the day waned. As the carriage rolled out through the hedges, Kent began quietly to talk of that peace of life in England, which lays its charm upon the person new to the spell. The symbols of it lay on every side; England's glorious past which spread before them in splendid castles and storied ruins; her wonderful beauty, her vast treasures. Aveling showed a growing irritation as the conversation rippled on. Mrs. Aveling grew nervous; Kent noticed the signs of it that escaped her vigilant self-control, and gradually there was borne to his mind the sense of some approaching trial. What it could be he could form no idea, but the bare thought of that waiting ordeal filled him with concern for the two miserable beings who sat cowed and silent.

Kent summoned into life all his powers of entertainment, skimming with light touch the estrangement of thought which lay like a ban upon moody Aveling, and plunged into a recital of boyhood events, common to both. He did not succeed. His talk fell as unregarded as the rattle

of the wheels. Mrs. Aveling gave way to some silent terror that blotted out every other part of her consciousness. Kent ceased to talk, and looked away.

The sun was sinking behind a range of distant hills. In front of them stood an ancient feudal castle, one of those monuments of a splendid history which lay on every side, weaving a spell about Kent's senses. He dropped the anxiety of Aveling's moods, and surrendering to the strange enchantment which lurked among the gray and broken ruins on every hillside, drifted out among his crowding fancies, reconstructing the splendor of the past. His imagination peopled vacant ruins. The sound of mirth and banquet rose in those silent halls. Noble knights, and alluring beauties cast off the unreality of legend, and trod those vaulted chambers in the pride of opulent and splendid life.

Whirling through this tangle of fact and fancy, Kent's reverie was rudely broken. The carriage turned abruptly under a gateway, a grim structure built heavily of gray stone. Aveling plunged into the silence with his deep voice, dwelling, as if by force of will, upon fact and commonplace.

"See, Kent, how carefully the effect has been developed. The ragged firs in that opening cut the sky like an etching. And that group of cop-

per beeches,—it gives a glow to the whole landscape.”

Kent looked out upon a level stretch of cultivated ground, bearing the fruit of thoughtful centuries. The avenue, through which they drove, was bordered by venerable limes, growing into a tangle overhead. They caught an occasional glimpse of a gorgeous sunset through the branches. As they suddenly emerged from the trees, Kent started in his seat. In the double gloom of time and falling night, there rose against the flaming sky, the ancient castle he had seen in the distance, in front of the range of hills. Projected with threatening violence out of that living past where Kent's mind had withdrawn, it seemed, to his enthralled and dreaming mood, to take on the semblance of a human face, stiffened, by some sinister experience, into a dreadful immortality.

Kent beat against the fantasies that fell upon him. But his eyes, held in some enchantment, seemed over and over to trace those dreadful features, as if he saw a sinister deed envisaged. Horrified by the pressure of thought, he turned away. But he was not the only one the uncanny place disturbed. Mrs. Aveling was looking at her husband like a charmed bird. Kent's eye swiftly followed hers. Aveling was leaning slightly forward, a hostile glitter in the veiled regard that rested on the castle. There had come a change

upon him that was not of color or outline, but as if he had lost that intangible thing we call the *self*, and on the familiar features was painted the image of a stranger. Kent, in horror, saw gathering there the outlines of the colossal Face he had seen in the mass of stone before him.

A smothered cry caused Aveling to move, and Kent saw that face of stone,—terrible—stricken! Aveling rose slowly to his feet, and stood poised like an evil power about to close about a helpless victim. Kent glanced around. Every one was motionless, struck into terrified silence. His glance returned to Aveling, who was making stealthy readiness to spring, with what murderous intention his clenched hands gave witness. Kent, with a swift movement, laid a grasp of iron on Aveling's wrists, and steadily fixing his gaze upon the stony eyes that met him, called loudly twice. "Ned! Ned! Wake up, boy. We're home."

There was a flash across his face, a shivering of his powerful frame, and Aveling returned to himself. Kent had released his wrists, but his hand was still extended. He glanced down, as if wondering how it came in that position. Suddenly, his old bewildering smile flashed out. "Well—won't you take my honorable hand?" he said, with a glimmer of his youthful fun. "Here's welcome to the House of Aveling."

Kent's heart leaped, for the gracious figure that leaned toward him against the dying splendor of the sky was, in voice and manner and person, the merry man Aveling he knew so well.

CHAPTER III

THE SPELL

KENT could not at once recover. He rose to leave the carriage, half inclined to doubt his senses. But, whether imagined or no, the dread of the house fell upon him with tangible weight, as he passed into its shadow. When he approached the massive portal, it opened to receive him like the maw of some horrible monster.

A sensation of relief came over him; as the heavy, oaken door swung back, and let out a flood of light, he began eagerly to talk. When they had entered, Aveling suddenly became brusque, and without much ceremony turned him over to a servant. Kent passively followed this functionary up the staircase, a massive structure of carved wood, widening occasionally into platforms to break the toilsome ascent to the next floor. Every footstep sounded loud upon the oaken boards, and struck a jarring note into the harmony below. It was a fascinating picture of rosy light, falling upon the mellow beauty of ages. Kent looked down for a moment, and then went on. The wide corridors led through a wilderness

of rooms, softly lit and hung with tapestry, opening out in every direction, until it seemed to his bewildered mind that he had stumbled into a castle of dreams, instead of the home of his lifelong friend. The servant, moving noiselessly ahead, selected a room in the multitude, and, inviting Kent to enter, followed him through the doorway.

“Mr. Aveling gave orders to have these rooms prepared for you, and I was to ask if you want to have anything changed, sir.”

Kent looked about in some surprise, as he heard the precise enumeration of provisions for his comfort. Aveling had remembered the most trifling personal tastes. He replied briefly to the servant's pressing inquiries that everything was quite to his liking, and felt relieved when the door had closed behind the man, and he was free to move with curious interest about the spacious apartment.

A bright fire snapped in a companionable manner in the ancient grate. Beside it stood a chair, a modern type he particularly liked, and nearby, a shaded lamp for nocturnal reading. A glow went through him. The forebodings he had felt dropped away like an outworn garment. They seemed incongruous in the dreamy repose with which the room wooed the senses, and the signs of friendly thought scattered on every side. He heard the sound of Aveling's voice somewhere in

the corridor. Mellowed and softened by distance, it became the ringing voice he used to know. He shook himself impatiently, the bewilderment of his recent emotions still upon him.

"I am ashamed of you, Kent," he said, half aloud, in the mood of youth before the memories of a vital, mellow age. "You are of the things raw and new."

He had fully recovered his easy buoyancy when he descended to the first floor, and almost ran into his host standing at the foot of the stairway. Aveling started, looked annoyed, and turned abruptly away. "Follow me," he said coldly. "We always sit in the Red Parlor."

It was like a dash of cold water to Kent. Was it possible that the chattering gossips had the truth? His disquiet returned, for Aveling had undergone some alteration which gave Kent the weird impression that another man had taken his place. He looked up and down the figure moving ahead of him. Even his very motions had changed. It required some effort on Kent's part to resume his usual manner.

"Say, Ned, is this a house or a town?" he asked, as they entered the Red Parlor. "If I hadn't been furnished by Providence with a bump of locality, I might be in the next county. I wandered off the main highway into the most incredible places, coming down. Don't you pro-

vide a chart and compass for plain Americans?" Kent's face was bland and open.

Aveling shrank a little, and dropped his eyes. His wife cut into the blank.

"The size of the house *is* overpowering. I felt the same way at first. After dinner, perhaps Edward will show you some of the rooms in this wing." She finished with a timid appeal, full of the tenderest concern.

Aveling perceptibly shivered, and began abruptly to talk, with a sharp, incisive voice.

"Kent, how do those ghostly experiments of yours get on?"

"The—table tipping, and so on?" asked Kent incredulously, unable to believe his senses.

"Yes. You know I—I've grown quite—interested."

Kent had a moment of amazement. Aveling could never be induced to so much as hear of Kent's psychological studies. It was the only difference of their college days, Aveling always asserting that every man has a loose screw, and that he had run on Kent's very early. But now he listened with avidity, and eagerly followed Kent's careful lead. He had evidently read and thought deeply about the subject, as Kent presently discovered. The amazing shift of interest was full of meaning.

Meanwhile, the talk wandered to other things,

but Aveling never failed to bring it back to some form of psychic thought, as if his mind were fixed there. Kent's anxiety became extreme. It wiped out his interest in the strange fortune which had fallen to Aveling's lot. He knew that rich treasures and ancient glories passed before him. But he saw only the master of this splendor, once the merriest of the merry, the inspiration of mad-cap gayety, wearing upon his darkened brow the sign of a spirit that wore sackcloth and ashes.

The puzzle only deepened when, after dinner, Aveling steadily ignored all the hints his wife urged upon him. She came, and laid a hand upon his shoulder, with smiling insistence. A dark flush stained his cheek. He grasped his chair, as if something strove to pull him away. "Don't worry me so, Aline. Can't you see I—I want to ask Kent—some questions?" he finished lamely, panting a little. Beads of cold sweat sparkled upon his brow.

Mrs. Aveling turned away, and did not answer. He threw a furtive glance at her. "You know I have a headache, dear," he said more gently, as if anxious to atone for his roughness.

But he turned at once to Kent, asking with some abruptness, "Do you think we are deathless beings?"

Kent took this to mean that Aveling wished to return to the subject of psychic research. He

considered Aveling's youthful scepticism before replying, and then rambled on about some experiments which were exciting much comment in America, some startling evidence of communication with the dead.

At this point, Aveling's interest became acute. He started forward. "Do you think communion with the dead is possible?"

"I do indeed," said Kent earnestly. "I think the only bar is the difficulty of finding a common speech."

He was disagreeably stirred, for before his very eyes, Aveling was altering, line by line. His countenance grew cold and sphinx-like, his stature seemed to increase. Kent turned away from the baleful light that glittered in his eyes, and continued to quietly talk. Aveling suddenly interrupted, as if following some inward train of thought. "Then even a trifling interference with the ordinary events of life might be considered as a sign that some one was trying to establish communication."

"Yes—yes, it might," Kent replied, his eyes on the fire. Aveling's hollow voice boomed like fog-bells. His impassioned interest was puzzling to Kent, who did not see in the least the drift of his talk. Kent replied cautiously. "There have been some messages, clearly not the result of fraud, which might indicate that some one was

trying to work the line. It is, at least, a reasonable conjecture. Now, for instance——”

He turned about, and then started to his feet. Aveling had vanished as completely as if he had been drawn upward through the air!

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

MRS. AVELING had risen to her feet. Her face was white, her eyes wide and staring. She put her hands to her throat. "You mustn't mind Ned's leaving, Mr. Kent. He is very tired. Perhaps you would like to go to your room."

Deeply mystified, Kent bade her good-night, and took himself upstairs. Once, in a favorable turn of the staircase, he looked back. Mrs. Aveling stood where he had left her, wringing her hands. Kent went on; but the whole house seemed to undergo an alteration. The corridors rustled as if unseen beings moved in the shades. The chambers yawned like black caverns as he passed. As he stepped into the darkness of his room, the fire in the grate, sunk to a bed of embers, stared out of the gloom like a dull red eye. He could no longer evade the fear that pressed upon him. This heritage of Aveling's contained a mystery, of what shape or meaning he could not guess; he only knew it to be a grim reality. Stirring the fire into a brisk blaze, he drew a chair before it, and, dropping into the easy hollow, gave him-

self up to all the unpleasant reflections which the situation evoked.

Kent knew only the barest outlines of Aveling's history. It had never interested either of them in their boyhood days. But now he ran over the scanty facts with anxious care. Aveling was an American by birth. His ancestry, after running back a few generations, crossed over to England. The family there was one of great wealth and power, stretching an unbroken line to William Conqueror, after which it was lost or dimmed in the haze of pre-Norman times.

In the colonial era, a younger son, stirred by a spirit of adventure, had gone away, under a cloud of wails and angry protests, to that new country then unveiling its young, raw face to a bewildered world. Perhaps, too, he felt the rebellion which stirred in the uneasy heart of England. At any rate, he left the country with a band of rovers, and never returned. From this redoubtable gentleman sprang that branch of the family of which Aveling was the last and only representative.

Aveling was a typical American, devoid of even the smallest interest in his fast-developing destiny. He was young, full of buoyant spirits, and as keenly alive as the migrating ancestor. He always listened with peals of laughter to the friends who at times, in all seriousness, urged

upon him considerations of the thinning wall about the English estate.

By one of those fatalities which make even the hardiest feel the stirrings of superstitious dread, the four lives between were swept away in the short space of four months. An English lawyer, very dignified and taciturn, brought the news to the heir. Shocked and startled out of himself as Aveling was, he first had desperate ideas of renouncing the succession. But after reflection sobered this extravagance, and as soon as possible, he and his bride set sail for England.

Here Kent's knowledge ceased, except for vague rumors reaching him at times that Aveling had turned forgetful of old friends. These he always stoutly denied, and, when the letter from Roxmoor arrived, it stilled uneasy suspicion, and he sailed away with a light heart.

Kent, sunk deep in musing, leaned his head against the chair. The fire leaped like a thing of volition. The corners of the room were blotched in shadow. A few candles starred the gloom. He seemed in a very sea of silence, with Aveling's passionate questionings about the human destiny beating in his brain. Why were these things matters of such burning interest, things which a year ago were scoffed at? Aveling was vitally interested in the possibility of communication with the dead. This lively concern had sprung up after

coming to Roxmoor, as if his change of attitude had its sole inspiration there. Every word and act of his indicated some unusual relation between the master and the place.

Kent fell to thinking more intently. Why should the old castle, mere shell of man's doings, create any human passion? But, as the thought crossed his mind, the dignity of this warden of the past rebuked him, for the majesty of ages marked its form and boundaries. This hoary shape of stone was more than a man-made shelter; it grew to meet human needs, registering the growth and death of many lives. The colossal foundations were laid by the terror of rude times. The frowning battlements rose to meet enmity and strife. Every detail about it was shaped by the need of the life it sheltered, as a bird, beak, claw, and wing, is shaped by its daily habit.

At this point, Kent's imaginings rose higher. Everything that lived and died within this habitation left some trace of its physical being. Then why should man ignorantly believe that the struggles of the spirit leave no trace? Shall physical need stamp an immortal shape, and the cry of the soul go unheard? It could not be that life would so deny the dignity of the spirit. The place was alive with the vibrations of human feeling,—of love and hate, joy and woe, pointing significantly to the shadow that cast its gruesome

length over the latest born of the Avelings. Some human grief had outlived the past, and struggled to be heard.

As these speculations shifted in Kent's brain, he felt again that odd drugging of the senses which befell him with the first sight of Aveling's face. Perhaps it might contain a hint of the blight which overhung the manor. With a conscious giving over to the mysterious influence, Kent sank into his chair. A deadly silence fell. Dim memories and dreams of memories began to shift. The firelight sank. The shadows crept stealthily from their lair upon the motionless figure in the chair. A slight wind rose outside, and shook the heavy shutters. Kent suddenly bounded to his feet. He had a sharp impression that some one stood beside him. The fire had fallen so low it cast only a circle of dull red about the hearth. The candles had sunk to tiny sparks. He stood for a moment, straining his eyes as he leaned forward. The uncanny feeling remained.

"Ned—is that you?" his voice floated off, a sepulchral echo of his usual full tones. Not a sound returned. As he stood, there came a gradual fading of the stealthy presence, until he once more felt alone.

With a mingled feeling of dismay and incredulity, he waited, listening. Although he heard nothing, there was the sense of retreating foot-

steps. He started forward, and turned on a flare of light. It flooded the room. No one was to be seen. He went to the door, and looked out into the corridor. A few lights burned low. A servant was passing through, carrying a candle.

"Did—has—has—Mr. Aveling retired?" stumbled Kent.

"Yes, sir. I left 'im 'aalf asleep just now."

It was an honest English face, but, as Kent looked, a half-amused scrutiny came into it. The man spoke again. "My name is Watson, sir. I am Mr. Aveling's man. 'E told me to walk down the corridor, and see if everything was right for you."

Kent felt abashed. How could he tell these intangible terrors to an English valet? "There is a shutter outside my window that makes a confounded racket. I don't understand the fastenings."

"I'll see to it, sir."

The man came in, and adjusted the shutter Kent pointed out. "I never could stand a rattling shutter," lied Kent, slipping a piece of silver into the man's hand. He saw the slightest flick of an eyelash.

"Maaster caan't abide a rattlin' shutter," said the man, as he vanished.

Kent closed the door, and turned away. His own face, alert and strained, suddenly confronted

him. He put up his hand to brush away this phantasmal vision of himself. It struck the wing of a folding mirror, which had swung open.

Overbalanced by this trivial occurrence, Kent, for one horrified moment, was suspended between two worlds. His speculations had gathered about the subtleties of mind and thought; and, behold, out of the air, there had risen the veritable substance of a human personality. He felt still the pressure of that unseen presence upon his quivering nerves. He cast a swift glance about the room. It was empty. With a mighty effort, he braced himself against the clamor of his senses. "Pshaw! I fell asleep, and dreamed," he said doggedly.

CHAPTER V

THE DANGER IN THE CASTLE

THE morning sunshine and fresh English air were streaming in at Kent's casement when he awoke. The room overlooked a garden, and he looked out with delight, from the deep embrasure, upon the first sunny thing he had seen about the place. It was an old English garden, enclosed with yew hedges, blazing with the flowers of late summer. Tiger-lilies hung in clusters of tawny beauty, imaging the spirit of a dreamy East. A bed of poppies, that spoke of drowsy syrups, spread out shallow cups of red and white. Kent turned impatiently away. Even there his mind seemed unaccountably to run along the track of mystery and passion.

As this thought flashed upon him, Kent's feeling changed, his scorn of last night's fears put down by the constant presence of some mystery. There was more in Ned's problem than could be accounted for by his change of living. A curious thrill shot through Kent. Was it possible that Aveling was in any trouble? He could imagine nothing within the range of probability. Aveling

seemed safe and secure, surrounded by wealth and ease. But something had befallen this expatriated pair, and, as they both preserved the deepest reticence, he thought it might be well to reconnoitre a little before blundering into the subject with questions which neither one might want to answer. There be many things undreamed in the philosophy of an American business man, Kent dryly remembered, and he prepared for closer observation.

He passed through the corridors with watchful senses. The transformation in himself gave value even to trifles. The heavily beamed ceiling overhead, almost lost in the shadow, and the ponderous stonework, were still sombre and severe, but less human in the daylight, which struggled through leaded casements set deep in thick walls. It came to Kent fantastically as the light of a late century, seeking to pierce the darkness of an old one.

He paused a moment at the stairhead. His glance leaped down the splendor of the ancient hallway. The fairy glow of last night had vanished, and left it gloomy. Old armor hung upon the walls, and trophies of by-gone sport. An immense hooded fireplace yawned black and empty. The floor was heavily paved with stout stone blocks. It was silent and empty as a tomb. Not a sign of life could be seen within its chill ex-

tent. Not even the dance of sunbeams on the floor. It had a curious effect of arrested life, as if here, like the still centre of a cyclone, was a spot of death in the whirl of a busy, late century.

Kent went on down the stairs. He suddenly stopped, chilled to the bone. For, not two feet away, stood the still form of Aveling, near the foot of the stairs. His hands were folded quietly over each other on the heavy oak balustrade. With the swiftness of strained attention, Kent noticed how still and wax-like they looked on the dark wood, as if life and volition had retreated out of them. The whole man, staring fixedly at some object beyond Kent's line of vision, seemed as lifeless as the coats of mail, which here and there stood in empty mockery.

For a moment Kent's stillness matched Aveling's. Then he crept silently up a few steps. Aveling retained his death-like attitude. Kent struck into a blithe song from one of the late operas, clattered loudly down the stairs, and, turning abruptly at the bottom, effected a neat collision with the figure leaning against the balustrade. Aveling tottered, as a stone image without the power of balance might have done. Kent caught the swaying form.

"Steady on, Ned. I was so busy with that con-founded trill——" Kent went on, pouring out a stream of talk until a look of intelligence emerged

in Aveling's face, followed by a faint smile about his white lips. He shook himself, as if waking from a sleep, and with a brusque word or two, started for the Red Parlor. Something white flashed out of a distant corner across Kent's vision. He glanced back. It was Mrs. Aveling's face. Her pallor was made ghastly by the cavernous, horror-struck eyes that steadily followed Aveling. Kent turned hastily away; the pallid face seemed to drift before him. Here, at least, was painted something tangible,—chilling, paralyzing fear. Perhaps, it might be possible to gain some useful hint from her.

"I wonder where Aline is," said Aveling irritably, glancing about the Red Parlor as they entered.

"I'm sure I don't know," blandly lied Kent.

She appeared in a few moments, and breakfast was immediately announced. Aveling looked closely at her across the table.

"Where did you get your red cheeks, dear?"

Kent saw the quick color rise under the rouge. But she rallied instantly. Her look met Aveling's with steady control. "Why, Ned, I believe the climate affects my skin. They say, Mr. Kent, the English color is an affair of climate." The tense animation of her face sought Kent's with an appeal.

"That's just what I think," he said, with hearty interest. "Perhaps you have noticed that the people in our western states all have a bleached appearance. I spent a whole summer in the West." He met her appeal.

"Oh, you did!" she exclaimed, with feverish cordiality. "Won't you tell us about it? I have never been West."

Kent beamed. "Will you really listen? I never before found any one who would. You can't imagine how brutal a human being can be, unless you try to tell him about your travels. Your very unique and interesting travels, Mr. Ned Aveling," he finished loudly.

"Oh, I wouldn't mind hearing you *talk*, Kent, but you will quote poetry."

"The trouble is, Ned, you're daft as a Frenchman about fitness. You won't take poetry, unless it's bound in morocco, presented beside a fire, with you at beautiful ease in a cushioned chair."

"Well! When a man stops a hair-breadth climb among the Rockies to quote Browning, it's the plain man's time to say things."

Aveling's eyes were blazing, and a flush had crept upon his cheeks. Some halting of the service caused Mrs. Aveling to look up. She saw the impassive man who served the meal staring in blank amazement at his master. The flow of talk went on until a loud, ringing peal of laughter fell

from Aveling's lips. This was instantly followed by a crash of china.

"Why—hullo! What's up?" asked Aveling, watching the flushed servant gather up the fragments of shattered china. Then he looked absently across the table. "I believe I never laughed before—in Roxmoor."

Mrs. Aveling drooped, and did not speak, and Kent, after a quick survey of Aveling's absent face, plunged into the silence with a garrulous reminiscence of an expedition to the Rocky Mountains to hunt for grizzlies. After a few moments, Aveling showed signs of interest, and presently gave his tale a close and interested attention. When they rose to leave the table, he seemed to have forgotten the unhappy memory spurred by the incident of the broken china. But on Mrs. Aveling's white cheeks, two spots of vivid red stood out.

After breakfast, they loitered awhile in the Red Parlor. Then Aveling rose. "Come on, Kent, let's take a little run through the house."

"All right. I'm your boy."

He noticed an anxious look cross Mrs. Aveling's face, but she kept silent. In the hope she might say something to him, Kent contrived to leave the room last. As he approached the door, he saw her crouched close beside it. She leaned forward when he passed her, saying in a

low voice, "Be careful of him, The Italian Wing!"

Kent went on, muttering to himself. "The Italian Wing! Now I wonder is it black or white or colored, and how in Heaven's name would a man hope to know it? Wings don't sound dangerous to me. Kent, you don't know this game."

But, in spite of his grim humor, a chill crept upon him. His speculations had received an answer. Danger lurked somewhere in the castle!

CHAPTER VI

THE ITALIAN WING

AVELING crossed the court which formed the central hall, and climbed the great stairs. He unlocked a door opening upon the upper gallery, and let Kent through. Then they traversed a series of corridors, with rooms on every side. Aveling was growing serious again. His manner became more stately as he stopped occasionally to recite events connected with the history of the house. The castle interior showed everywhere marks of turbulent times. The size of it was enormous. A town might comfortably lodge within its walls.

They had reached a sort of enclosed court, which overlooked a range of three galleries. Aveling was telling of some riots which occurred there in Bloody Mary's reign, and martyrdoms that led to the closing of this portion as accursed. His voice rose weirdly in the recital.

Kent coolly surveyed the place. "I say, Ned, why don't you rent out some of these streets? The place wants livening."

Aveling gasped. "I say, Kent, your bump of reverence wants looking after."

But the shot told. His gloom lifted, and his voice became natural, to Kent's unmeasured surprise. "I guess that Wing flopped," he said, to himself. "But why, in nature, is it dangerous?"

Kent grew more absorbed as they went deeper into the endless corridors. He studied, with thoughtful care, the various eras superimposed upon each other, directing especial attention to the main building from which the wings spread out. Aveling was telling him that this was the real ancestral home. Its date was unknown. Only the perfectly traceable family line gave any clue to its origin. They knew it was standing when the Normans trampled the Saxons underfoot.

They had penetrated deep into the remotest portion of the castle. Not a sound came from the outside world, shut away by walls of silence. They were standing close together, when some strange uneasiness began to fret Kent, some curious longing. He glanced at Aveling, who was staring at an old panelled wall, black with age, and unbroken by door or window. Kent found the spot upon which Aveling's eye was fixed. A panel exactly like the others. On closer inspection, it seemed to fit a little more loosely.

All at once, a curious thing happened to Kent.

He felt something like an electric current nip his tingling nerves; and presently, along that track, there stole thoughts and feelings which amazed him. Silently he moved, until he touched Aveling's shoulder, and together they were swept into a mood of smouldering passion. Aveling was breathing loudly, and Kent plainly felt the pressure of some grim force which Aveling held desperately at bay.

Kent's loose thoughts began to string together. Some organizing power flowed toward him from the aging pile of stone and wood, and gathered round the ghostly encounter in his room last night. The haunted structure held something like a belated traveller from the past, and Aveling, caught in its grip, was hastening to unforeseen ends. Kent resolved to gain something from the moment. He raised his hand, pointing to the loose panel.

"Ned, is that a secret door?"

"Yes. It leads to the Italian Wing."

By Heaven, he had stumbled on it! He paused a moment, irresolute. How could he let the chance slip to explore the secret? And yet, how dared he risk a danger he did not understand? Mrs. Aveling had told him to beware of the Wing. Aveling crossed the floor, and opened a heavy shutter.

"You can see it from here," he said.

Kent followed to the window, and, looking out upon a long wing, saw, like an excrescence upon it, a garden front, interrupting awkwardly the splendid lines of an otherwise consistent whole. It was close shut and barred.

"It looks like an addition," he ventured, consumed with curiosity.

"It was built for the homesick bride of a Middle Age Aveling. She was an Italian."

But this told Kent nothing of the danger which haunted the Wing. To save him, he could not help the words that followed: "Are we going in? It looks as if I'd like it."

Aveling's face became an inscrutable mask. He drew into a rigid posture, and, putting out a hand, mechanically closed the shutter and locked it. Kent, bitterly repenting his rash words, saw him move toward the panel and pause before it, making a motion as if to touch the spring. Then, suddenly, with a visible wrench of his whole being, he tore himself away, and, quickly crossing the floor, opened a door, disclosing a winding staircase. A slight paleness and a quick-drawn, silent breath betrayed that he had ventured near some danger.

"This leads to the battlements overhead," he said formally. "The view is superb."

CHAPTER VII

THE BURDEN

ON the fourth day after Kent's arrival, Mrs. Aveling came in from a drive with a light on her face he had not seen before. "Oh, Ned," she began, "who do you suppose is here? Betty Cary is visiting Lady Melton. I just went over by accident. She said she wanted to surprise me."

Through the happy ripple of words that followed, Kent learned that this was one of Mrs. Aveling's girlhood friends, and that they were all coming to dinner the next night. Aveling was interested at once, and suggested a few additions to the party. Kent gathered, from the talk which followed, that they were on very good terms with the neighborhood. The Melton family were blood relations, and James Carew was a close friend of the late master of Roxmoor.

"We want you to know our new friends," said Mrs. Aveling, turning to Kent.

"Is it to be very formal? Will I be very much frightened?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Our dinner parties are never formal.

We try to keep some of the dear old American ways," she said, with a shadow on her face. "You will like Lady Melton,—she is lovely. And you will just *love* Betty," she finished earnestly.

"Why, of course I will. Did you ever see a girl I didn't love?"

She got up, with a peal of laughter, and went out. They heard her singing as she went. Even Aveling's face was bright and eager. The slightest shift of this new life, with its solemn dignities, eased and renewed them both.

This diversion chanced to be very welcome to Kent. In the last two days Aveling had gone through many changes of mood which Kent feigned not to see. He noticed, with some annoyance, that his own moods conformed strangely to Aveling's capricious ones. His even spirits were never used to run very high. But neither did they sink into these deeps of heaviness and apprehension. He tried to evade them, with angry scorn, but they bestrode his consciousness like an old man of the sea, for Mrs. Aveling's warning about the Italian Wing, together with his own experiences, pointed to some uneasiness associated closely with the house. Kent felt a gathering curiosity on that point. He felt it to be necessary to proceed with some caution. He was only a guest in the house, and might easily become an officious meddler. But a vague fear prowled

in the background of his thoughts. He had had no warning, before he came, that anything was amiss, except for the idle gossip he had swept impatiently aside. Henshaw's queer actions at the steamer returned with sinister meaning. It was evident to Kent that the general public was familiar with a range of facts unknown to him.

He, therefore, eagerly looked forward to the dinner, with the hope of gaining some useful knowledge concerning the mystery which surrounded Aveling. These strange moods could not be caused by the unaccustomed splendor of his new life. Kent's study of psychic research pointed to the influence of something deeper. It was a commonly accepted fact, among the students of this science, that old houses may cause a change of character. Something like this must have occurred. But in such cases it was always some definite emotion that was aroused,—fear, anger, sorrow,—something that would point the way to a definite cause. Here Kent hoped for light from that meeting with Aveling's friends.

When the evening came, he watched, with every sense alert, to catch even the straw's betrayal, as the rooms began to fill. It was a somewhat mixed company, with a strong infusion of American ideals. There were heads of county families of more or less importance; a clergyman or two, and Dr. Warren, the family physician, whom Kent had

met before. They renewed the acquaintance, now, with some interest.

The butler threw back the carved doors.

"Lord and Lady Melton."

Kent caught these two names with deep interest, and bent a close inspection upon the tall beauty emerging from the doorway. Her robes fell about her graceful movements with statuesque simplicity. At her neck and wrists sparkled the wonderful Melton diamonds. If she knew anything of the uneasiness at Roxmoor, there were no signs of it in her words of greeting. This Lady Melton might prove to be an admirable person, thought Kent.

This interesting lady was followed by a tall, fresh-faced man. Under the cover of Lady Melton's lively flow of words, the stranger directed a look, sharp as a lance, at Aveling, who was talking with Lady Melton. It struck Kent that Aveling looked particularly pale to-night. There was a hint of something imperious and haughty in his bearing.

He was a little surprised to see this formal manner soften somewhat, as Aveling called out to him. The faintest hint of something instantly suppressed betrayed Lady Melton's studied gayety. Kent noticed a fleeting exchange of look between this titled pair whom he was summoned to meet, as if his presentation bore some significance. His

penetration was utterly baffled. He bowed over the slim grace of the beautiful hand that Lady Melton held out to him.

"I am so glad to meet you, Mr. Kent. Roxmoor has been shut away from us all for so long. It seems so good to see it full of life again."

Kent failed to read what lay behind the simple words. An admirable person, this Lady Melton. He could not pierce her light calm any more than he could part the Red Sea.

"Full of life!" he repeated, with a ruminating air. "Full of life. Does that mean me? I had no idea I was so—expansive."

Lady Melton fanned her cheerful face, with the frank smile upon it. "Oh, I knew at once that *you* were what Roxmoor needed."

Kent was looking keenly at her as she spoke. Something began to dawn back of those frank eyes. She slowly transferred them to Aveling, and back to Kent, and, as he looked, the Red Sea parted!

When dinner was announced, there was some shifting among the groups. Kent found himself beside the young American girl, looking down the long table. The wax-lights sent a soft glow out to the shadowy Aveling hanging in solemn state over the mantel-piece. Kent's glance, by accident, rested upon Aveling, and he started. He had not noticed, before, how closely Aveling's face

followed the ancestral type; that high, polished brow, that backward sweep of hair, that proud cut of feature. The high, almost haughty lift of countenance he wore to-night gave it that indefinable *set* by which the same features wear so many shapes.

Kent became dimly aware that his neighbor was not insensible to these intangible stirrings. She was making uneasy, fluttered movements.

“Mr. Kent, don’t you think these old feudal castles would be uncanny—if you lived in them?”

Kent was wondering if she had noticed his pre-occupation, and felt annoyed.

“I like the way you qualify your idea,” he lightly returned.

A word from Aveling caught Kent’s ear. Sir James Carew was telling of the old Roxmoor days. It was evident he was ill at ease, and that Aveling was leading him on. Kent vainly tried to hear.

“Are your spirits affected by them?” Kent turned again to his neighbor. Her face wore a bewildered, half-frightened look.

“I don’t know what it is that affects them,—but——” She glanced hurriedly at Aveling, and turned again to Kent. “Why, Melton Abbey does not affect me so.”

Evidently Lord Melton kept his impressions to himself.

"Do you—don't you—feel it, living here?" she whispered.

"Oh, I'm the most unimpressionable person alive. I should dearly love to meet a flesh-and-blood ghost."

"Yes, but they are not flesh and blood. That's just the trouble," with a rueful attempt to follow his light mood.

"Then, dear lady, how can they affect us much?" he said, in a teasing tone.

She flashed a baffled look at him. "I would know you were an American if I met you on the Pyramids," her red lips pouted.

"——they bear the marks of history and experience, as plainly as a biological specimen carries its ancestry among its curves and wrinkles."

Aveling's voice, like a deep-toned bell, struck every one into silence, with a pomp and solemnity that startled Kent. Everybody looked at Aveling with a fearing expression which lent their faces a curious similarity.

"Then you think that houses contain inefaceable records of the lives that have been lived in them." Lord Melton spoke with a certain dry detachment.

Aveling's face was dark, but it glowed dully.

"I do. How do you otherwise account——" He stopped abruptly, and began afresh, with a steely change of tone. "All houses have their

atmosphere. We feel it,"—his voice sank. "We obey it!"

The silence was oppressive. Aveling's manner had acquired a tragic significance. A slight accession of his stately calm produced that nameless alteration Kent was learning to dread.

Lady Melton's silken draperies gave out a faint rustle. She glanced at Mrs. Aveling. "I don't think I agree with you," she said. "It seems to me to be an effect made upon the mind by mere age, and transferred artificially to the thing. Oh, you needn't laugh!" She suddenly turned to Lord Melton, who was making extravagant gestures of dismay. He rolled up his eyes.

"That ever I should hear Lady Melton formulate scientific theories," he breathlessly exclaimed.

Aveling bent toward her suddenly, with a pale intensity of countenance, completely ignoring the lead into less dangerous channels of talk.

"But, Lady Melton, consider the array of facts. It is a matter of scientific evidence that a house carries its influence as distinctly as a person. We sometimes fall under the spell of a living man, and are swayed against our will. And now science tells us that a man may die, and yet the agony and joy of his life remain; even the very elements of personality survive bodily wreck."

There was no mistaking the deadly earnestness of Aveling's mood. It was not a theory he was

putting forth, but a grim, personal experience, a fact he meant that every one should understand.

Lady Melton crumbled a bit of bread. But she did not look again at Mrs. Aveling. She knew only too well the mixture of emotions that was gathering upon her pale face. She dropped the bread, and directed a startled look at Aveling, allowing an expression of mock horror to dawn slowly upon her face. "For goodness' sake! Do you suppose there is any danger of my following the pious shades of dead and gone Meltons into their nunneries and monasteries? They were uncomfortably pious, you know."

Everybody laughed. It even pierced Aveling's deadly seriousness, and the conversation became lighter.

When Kent entered the drawing-room, after dinner, he realized that Aveling's mood had changed, for as his host went through the rooms, exchanging a word or two with the various groups of people scattered about, his old-time, bantering gayety seemed to emerge and obliterate the stately being of the early evening. Kent was baffled.

But he was nearer to enlightenment than he dreamed. He was standing in the hall at the foot of the stairs, ostensibly talking to Lady Carew, with a little puzzled wonder at Sir James' choice of a wife,—an elfin creature, with an inordinate love of fanciful dress. She tinkled and dangled

with ornaments. She overran with ruffles and ruchings and frills. She made quick, bird-like motions, with arch looks and coy smiles. Surely so empty a piece of womanhood he had seldom seen. She was chattering of the company, the charms of Roxmoor, so weird,—the Avelings, the dear, delightful Americans.

In the midst of her vapid talk a wave of stupefying emotion swept over Kent. He was standing at the foot of the stairs. He could not control a start of surprise. Was that a portrait of Ned? As he looked, the mists cleared away, and he saw an old, darkened portrait of a dead and gone ancestor, dressed in the stately robes of the Middle Ages, gorgeous with dangling chains and jewels. As Kent continued to look, he wondered how he could have fancied a likeness to Ned in that dark face that seemed to regard the merry throng from beneath the ashes of renunciation. If ever a human face showed the gnawing of remorse, the face of the old Crusader did. And yet, as he looked, he saw again the very person of the man who had mysteriously vanished from sight the first evening.

“It is quite puzzling, is it not, Mr. Kent?”

He looked down at Lady Carew’s simpering prettiness. “Puzzling?” he repeated. “Puzzling?”

“Oh, I don’t suppose *you* find it so,” with an arch look. “You will, no doubt, be able to find

out, and tell us at once. Americans are so shockingly clever."

What in time is she driving at? thought Kent. A look of penetration, rising in the face he scanned, checked his thoughts.

"Can tell you what, may I ask, Lady Carew?"

A deep and subtle meaning blazed over her face. "One has such strange impressions, as dear Mr. Aveling said." Her glance shot for a moment to the old portrait which had stirred Kent so deeply. She softly stepped nearer, a glow in her witch-like face. "Why does the portrait so strangely change him? What has he done to deserve the burden of any man's remorse?"

She paused, but Kent, stunned by the implication of her remarks, did not reply. There was the faintest tinge of mockery in her voice as she spoke again. "I am sure that *you* will find out at *once*." Some one spoke to her, and she moved away, leaving Kent in the whirl of a bewildering idea. Remorse! Nothing could be further from Ned's blameless life. What could it mean?

CHAPTER VIII

A VICARIOUS PENANCE

LONG after the last guest had departed, Aveling sat talking. His deadly seriousness had gone. His company mood, which had been an evident surprise to every one, mounted higher, and kept Kent a silent listener late into the night, wondering what mysterious turn of fate linked laughing Ned and his ancient double. When they separated for the night, Kent, ascending the stairs, glanced back. Aveling's face was bright and cheerful. He looked almost boyish in his evening clothes. He threw up his head with one of his flashing smiles. "By my holidam, man, but it's good to have you here!"

As the ancient phrase left his lips, a nameless change fell upon the bright face. Kent paused, uncertain whether to leave him or no. But, as he looked, Aveling turned away, and walked slowly out of sight. Kent went on to his room.

But once alone, all his disquiet returned, with fresh force, as he went over the amazing events

of the evening. Ned felt and obeyed something pulling at him, and apparently gave it the importance of a personality. Now suppose the incredible thing *could* happen; suppose some human drama, some acute experience, had outlived the man who set it in motion, and lingered through the centuries for fresh embodiment. What experience could be sufficiently vital to so reverse the ordinary flow of events? Nothing in Ned's seizures had given him any clue. There was nothing but a mingling of fear and anger.

But here, Lady Carew's hints came to his aid. For, if it were true that some forgotten Aveling had dipped his life so deep in crime as to raise a perpetual cry of penitence, some further and more insistent form of it should come, to draw a purpose about these formless episodes. For that it would move to a definite end, Kent did not doubt.

He fell into a troubled sleep, to wake again to fresh ponderings, with that Face following him in the darkness. He sprang up at last, tormented by his thoughts, which stayed with heavy insistence upon Lady Carew's words. Remorse, and that laughing spirit! It was incredible.

When the first streaks of dawn began to invade his room, he dressed, meaning to go down and prowling about in the garden. He left his room, and

went quietly through the corridor, pushing open the door which he thought led to the garden, and for a moment was too surprised to move.

He was in a small chapel, where windows let in a softly tinted light that only half revealed shapes of marble and shadowy paintings upon the wall: a beautiful and fitting place for solitary devotions. He advanced further up a side aisle, marvelling at the riches each moment disclosed. An altar, heavily ornamented, stood at the end. He moved forward to examine it, and came to an abrupt pause, for Ned Aveling, still dressed in his evening clothes—the merry Ned whom Kent had left in the old buoyancy of spirit some five hours ago—knelt in the gray dawn, locked in some awful austerity of penance or petition, as the knights of old kept a vigil.

Kent crept softly nearer. There was an appalling stillness about the kneeling figure. His profile showed deathly white against the shadow. His eyes were fixed straight ahead. Kent could just see the rise and fall of his quick breath, and his moving lips. There was a deadly intensity about him that seemed to tell of some struggle of the soul, as if in some distant chamber of it there were battlings of primeval passions.

Kent fell back before the horror that rushed upon him. All his speculations found horrible

warrant in the kneeling figure. It was no mere mood which held this forceful being spell-bound; but some other personality, too strong for death to hold, demanding of this living man the power to create an act of penance.

CHAPTER IX

A TWILIGHT VISION

AT twilight on the following day, Kent was at the piano. He had stolen away in an effort to be alone, for Aveling dogged him everywhere. Kent heard him approaching now, followed by Mrs. Aveling's light step. They halted together on the threshold. "Will we bother you, if we come in?" Aveling wistfully asked.

"If you'll promise not to mind my soulful flights in song, I'll try to stand it, Ned."

Aveling smiled, and dropped heavily into a chair. He was very pale, and looked exhausted. Mrs. Aveling pulled a stool to his side, and, sinking into it, put her head upon his knee. He began to smooth her hair, absently keeping pace with the rhythm of Kent's music.

They were in one of the oldest rooms in the wing which they inhabited, a shabby place, evidently not much in favor with late generations. It contained a collection of rare music, which promised hours of delight to Kent. The yellowed sheets filled a series of latticed shelves, running round the recess in which the piano stood.

Kent's hands wandered idly over the keys. He had a gift for improvisation, and in the twilight his music had a weird and penetrating charm. He was thinking of last night's scene in the chapel, and unconsciously his mood took expression on the keys. His thoughts were in confusion, concerning the cause of these weird occurrences into which Aveling was plunged. No human agency had a hand in their creation, so far as he could see, and no one could help or hinder their approach. That convulsion of penitence at the altar last night sprang unbidden out of the void. Kent's uneasiness grew insistent and menacing, for that strange scene left the conviction of a real act,—it ran upon the elemental passions.

He glanced at the fiery sunset light, falling on Mrs. Aveling's bowed head, the regular motion of Aveling's long, tremulous hand, and his musing face, half lost in the shadow. The possibility of some fresh demonstration sickened him. He could not face these scenes to-day. He had a sense of physical exhaustion, and a deep moral distaste.

He took his hands from the keys, but no one spoke as he silently placed upon the rack some yellow sheets unearthed from the latticed shelves. A pair of silver candlesticks, fantastically carved, burned one on each side of the rack. By the uncertain light he began to read the faded notes,

—a solemn, wailing Miserere, strangely alive with the old, and yet ever new cry, of the soul for more light upon the entanglement of human relations.

As he played he became aware of a moral uplift, as when the soul reaches a higher plane in the ascent of life. From some far-off place came the very music of the spheres, and there rose a vision,—a place of deliverance, weirdly beyond his spell-bound senses.

“Edward!”

Kent's hands came down with a crash upon the keys. He sprang from his seat. Mrs. Aveling was kneeling before her husband, her arms about him, pouring an agonized cry into his ears. The sun, in a last expiring effort, threw a blaze of light upon Aveling, who leaned forward, clutching the arms of his chair. His brows were drawn together in an effort to fix his vision, his whole form knotted in some contraction of dread or fear.

“Edward! Edward!—my darling,—Ned!” Mrs. Aveling's voice stabbed the shadows, as if to recall a retreating spirit. As Kent looked, he saw that Face he had seen but once shape its sinister outlines in the dull light. Aveling had risen, and his wife still clung to him, caressing his pale face and murmuring low cries of distress.

With a sudden start, he shook off the grip of the power that had fallen on him. He put his arms about Mrs. Aveling's trembling form, with an expression of solicitude. "Why, dearest—what is the trouble?" he tenderly asked.

She shivered and looked miserably at Kent, but did not answer.

"Tell me, Aline. What is the matter? Did something frighten you?" He peered anxiously into her face.

"Why, Ned—I put my head down on your knee, and—I must have gone asleep—and dreamed." She began to tremble again. Aveling laughed, and, drawing her closer into his arms, soothed her as he would a child. "Poor little girl! Dreams are so real, sometimes." He looked up at Kent. "Go on, old man. Play something lively,—a bit of ragtime, or the latest thing from old Broadway."

Kent stared in helpless amazement at the swift transformation of the man his music raised. Into what chasm of being had that mysterious face dropped?

CHAPTER X

RAISING THE UNSEEN

FOR several days Kent did not go near the music-room. He had been startled out of himself by an almost visible embodiment of Ned's unseen tormentor, and he struggled with a horrible temptation. Now that he was used to the thought, it seemed less fantastic that a dead man should usurp a living form to carry out his will, and he longed to know if he had the power to summon that uncanny presence. It might prove much to his conclusions, for every day increased the evidence that Aveling's friends were in a state of alarm about him, and Kent meant to carry forward some plan of action. One thing alone anchored his purpose,—Mrs. Aveling's strong and terrible fears.

The depth of her anguish Kent witnessed daily. She watched Aveling with ceaseless vigilance, concealing it with a readiness at which Kent marvelled. Never a quivering eyelash went unmarked by that silent watch that seemed to Kent to rise out of the corners of the room. Never a shadow fell upon Aveling's face unseen. If he paused

upon the bridge across the pond, a shadow flitted among the trees. If he sank wearily under the elms in the park, a curtain fluttered at a neighboring window. If he paced the corridor, an almost silent footfall echoed his heavy tread. Just what she feared, Kent did not know. After all, these seizures left Ned unharmed. But there was something ominous in the behavior of all the people he had met. They seemed to be in expectation of something more than he had seen, and Kent had not the smallest idea of what it could be. Considering the general silence, he did not feel ready for much conversation on the subject with any one; not, at least, until he had solved the mystery of that scene in the music-room, and knew there lived in the air about them a form he could evoke at will.

In the few days that followed the dinner party, Aveling made Kent very well acquainted with the Manor and its surroundings. He even went into the little chapel, pointing out its treasures with a dryness of speech that Kent admired. After that, with a glimpse of his old humor, he bade Kent take care of himself, an invitation which was accepted with alacrity. Kent made a careful show of his occupied hours. He read ostentatiously in Aveling's sight. He wandered through the walled gardens, expatiating loudly upon their beauty. He loitered beside the deep

pools. But, under his lazy nonchalance, he kept a watch, waiting to track that stealthy presence, invisible as air, that sprang out of the void with a grip like a tiger's jaw.

At the earliest opportunity Kent returned to the music-room to study carefully the song which had thrown Aveling so deeply into the mystery. It was in a collection of medieval music, put together, apparently, in the eighteenth century. The thing he played was a devotional song, used by pious pilgrims who travelled to the Holy City during the Crusades. The book suddenly fell out of Kent's hands. There was a strong religious bias in the Aveling family. Was its nascent power stirring in Ned? He picked up the book, and ran over the simple measures with the soft pedal down, and resolved to play it, some day, to see what effect it had. If there was any power resident in the simple theme, the effect ought to be constant, and, if he again raised that fearful shape, it might give him entrance to a region hid in darkness.

Things did not lend themselves to his purpose for several days. Then he chanced to hear Mrs. Aveling remark, one night, that she meant to leave them alone the next day, to have an old-time visit with Betty Cary at Melton Abbey.

Kent was not supposed to know this. Accordingly, he disappeared to the music-room directly

after breakfast, knowing well that Aveling would soon find him there.

A long French window looked out upon the garden. It was a warm morning, and the window stood open. Aveling's voice was presently heard outside, inquiring of a passing servant for the whereabouts of "Mr. Kent." There was just time to slip the book under cover. Kent was deep in "Peer Gynt" when Aveling's spare form appeared in the window.

"*Well*, I have had a hunt for you."

"Have you? Why, I've been here an hour or more," said Kent, turning away from the piano.

"Go on. Don't mind me," said Aveling, dropping into a chair. "Just keep on with your classic selections. I can't tell one from the other, and, if that one amuses you, I am game. Lady Melton carried Aline off for the day, so you are a committee to amuse me. But I'm in an amiable mood, and easy to please."

Kent moved the music on the rack. A corner of the ancient song-book came into view. He could make his trial now. Mrs. Aveling was out of reach. There was no one to shock, if what he feared would follow.

After a glance at the lazy figure, stretched at ease, Kent struck into the harmonies of the first movement of the "Peer Gynt" suite. The trills and horn-like notes seemed to breathe of morning

freshness, producing its own serenity in Aveling's quiet face. The last faint trills and diminishing arpeggios died, and Aveling did not stir. With a little hesitation, Kent sounded the soft gloom of the death of Ase. The sombre, swelling chords called up vague images of melancholy. He saw Aveling's face darken and grow veiled. He swept Aveling's mood like a harp.

Without a break, he changed from the melancholy of the upper notes to the minor song from the old book. Aveling's face gleamed like steel. The song wailed on. With starting eyes and chilled blood, he saw that awful change. Aveling's form began to knot, his vision concentrate——

Kent had seen enough. With a sudden crash of march-like chords, he plunged into the Toreador's song, his rich voice starting up the echoes.

Aveling sprang upon him. "My God, man!"

Kent put a pair of iron hands upon him. Aveling was deathly white, he labored in some awful convulsion of the soul. Kent waited,—he felt the relaxing of knotted muscles.

"Why, Kent—I—I——"

"Well, you what?"

Aveling's vision wavered, he looked around the room, bewildered. "I thought—I—saw something."

"You saw me."

His eyes came back to Kent. There was an

effort to marshal his scattered mind forces. "I thought I heard something."

"You did. You heard me play."

Aveling shook his head. "I heard the trampling of a great crowd, and saw lances and banners, and heard the sound of loud huzzas." His wavering mental poise scattered again.

"Why, wake up, man. You've been dreaming," said Kent, with a clap on his shoulder.

Aveling's face, wistful as a child's, searched Kent's. "Do you think that is it?"

"Why, sure. My music put you asleep. I always consider it to be a compliment."

There was not the slightest flicker of fun at this bald nonsense. Aveling sighed heavily, and returned to his seat. His steps were slow and feeble. As soon as he touched the chair, he bounded out of it, as if it were afire. "I can't sit there—I can't sit there. Don't ask me!" He grasped Kent's arm with nerveless fingers, his voice shook. His sturdy, masculine powers were gone.

It was evident that Aveling was incapable of getting out of this maelstrom unaided. Kent watched the struggle, and felt the frenzied appeal of clutching fingers. It was horribly certain to Kent that he could raise the spirit. Could he send it back to its invisible habitation? He took firm hold of Aveling.

"Come, Ned. You have not tried that pair of hunters which came to the stables yesterday. Let's take a gallop over the downs."

His eye resolutely held Aveling's, whose face began to brighten.

"The very thing!" he said joyfully.

He stretched his arms above his head, his resolute self came back. His step was full of spring, his face alight. The *Thing* had gone!

CHAPTER XI

A FRESH TRAIL

THE next day Kent was lounging about the large pond, watching the slow-moving carp and wondering if a boat, moored at the bottom of some moss-grown steps, was meant for use. He had not seen Aveling all day, which gave him some quiet hours to turn over the alarming facts he had gathered, and consider his own relation to them, for he had plainly been an agent in last night's transformation.

He began to wish he had not meddled, for his own dreadful convictions were forcing him into a clinch with things beyond his calculation. The influence inhabiting the house was something of such stout fibre as to obey a set of laws, and, unwittingly, Kent had invaded that unseen empire. But his conquest was of dubious value, for it lay in his grasp with no relation to any onward movement.

He began to feel the urgency of council. So far as he could see, the various forms of Aveling's alteration had no relation; and yet, if they followed a chain of sequences which allowed a

third person to produce an effect at will, they must belong together and be parts of a discoverable whole. Here Kent wanted help, or, at least, the knowledge of such facts as might be known. If Aveling could describe his sensations more fully, it might shape a way to use the horrible power Kent had within his grasp. He resolved, at any rate, to introduce the subject as soon as Aveling was in condition for a talk.

An uncanny feeling of being watched crept over him. His muscles knotted, as if a galvanic current had been applied. His eyes started from his head, and he began to turn, as if he were a puppet in a Titan's hands, until presently he faced Aveling, who stood some three paces away. Aveling's eyes were fastened on him, and, in the hard glitter of his regard, Kent felt something like the pressure of a cage. He was bound, soul and body, in bondage to Aveling's will. He saw Aveling raise his arm with a peculiar motion, and heard him speak in slow, formal tones: "Come with me. I have need of you."

Kent's invisible bonds burst at the sound of these words. He rose to his feet. Aveling was plainly in the shadow of his second personality. Kent had not the least idea how to avoid the danger, whatever it was, that always lurked about his transformations. He made an effort to recall Aveling's lost self. Reaching downward, he gath-

ered up a small pebble and sent it over the glassy surface of the water. "Do you remember how we used to skip stones at the old mill-pond? and how I threw you down once, because your stone touched the water more times than mine?"

Kent looked up at the bitter face, lined beyond recognition. His words woke no response in Aveling, who stared absently ahead. "I—don't understand," he said thickly, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. Kent's attempt to spur the memory of a boyish reminiscence had driven him dangerously near the forbidden line. He dared not move again until Aveling spoke.

"I want to go for a walk," he said. There was an odd mingling of helpless appeal and brusque command.

"All right," said Kent. "Where shall we go?"

Aveling did not answer. He turned away, and plunged into a pace which Kent found it hard to equal, moving as if he wore winged sandals.

In spite of his bravest effort, Kent fell behind. Aveling began to talk, and, hearing the answer so far in the rear, turned in his path. He looked steadily into Kent's face, and Kent saw into his very being. Aveling was fighting a battle for supremacy of his soul, and the Invader warily pressed for every inch. But he was fighting well; it was not the helpless giving over in the music-

room. A faint hope stirred in Kent. The chance he was looking for might come, if he followed closely.

Aveling fell back until they walked together, and began to talk in a lighter vein, seeming to take a close interest in the village folk they met, who touched their forelocks and courtesied to the manor-folk. The dark power upon Aveling seemed to be held in abeyance.

Kent had the impression that Aveling had set out for an objective point; but, as they rambled on, he dismissed it as an unaccountable vagary. Especially when, as the result of an occasional glance, he saw Aveling apparently examining the landscape with close attention. They passed old churches covered with dark-green creepers; they crossed moss-hung bridges, hoary with age; they feasted on the rich loveliness of rural England, the drooping willows, the graceful elm, the sheep peacefully feeding, the startled deer bounding away through brush and bracken.

To Kent, it was a time of rare enjoyment. He had forgotten, for the moment, the dark mood of his companion. They went down a quiet path, where Aveling abruptly paused. When Kent came up with him, he saw a child standing in the shelter of the gateway,—a shy, still thing, with a pair of friendly eyes. Aveling spoke gently to her.

A sudden, strange impression fell upon Kent, as if the shadow which enveloped Aveling reached out and hung about the child. He looked down in some astonishment. Was it possible that this wayside peasant had any relation to Aveling's enigma? As the thought came to him, he saw evidences of distress in Aveling, who turned a fearfully altered face toward him, and then started down the path.

With a few quick strides, Kent reached Aveling's side and grasped his arm. "Tell me, Ned. Who is that beautiful child? Is she foreign-born?"

"No!" The single word fell harshly. Aveling muttered indistinguishable words and made wild gestures, swaying in a half-dream. "Somehow she makes me think of that Italian balcony at Roxmoor," he went on, in a dreamy tone,— "and those strange Italian things of hers——" He shook his head like one mesmerized, sighing heavily. "It is all so puzzling!"

With a rush of horror, Kent saw the descent of something that transformed the man, as much as if another stood in his place. His eye set, and he drove forward with a deathless fixity of purpose. Without a break in that furious pace, he kept on until he reached the gate of a cemetery, where he paused, and, standing still, glared

through the iron bars, his hands clenched upon them.

Kent came up beside him. He had no knowledge of how to deal with Aveling, possessed by his uncanny second self, but decided to risk a question about the child. Before he had time to speak, Aveling turned away, and, without warning, disappeared among the undergrowth beneath the trees.

Kent stared helplessly at the slight quivering of the bushes that remained, and then, sinking upon the ground, gave himself up to silent laughter.

"What, in the name of conscience!" he thought. "Here I am laughing like a hyena, and tears were befitting, I trow. How in time will I find my way home?"

He lay back on the grass for awhile in deep thought, disturbed by the conviction which clung to him that the child's fate was in the tangle. Ned probably would tell him who she was; no doubt, he could be induced to talk, and they could wring the subject dry together.

He sprang up, and peered through the gate at the silent graves, but decided not to go in. He must not run the risk of annoying Aveling. He went down the path, seeing no trace of the child, but meeting a small boy, who told him he

was within sight of Roxmoor, hidden only by the trees. He walked on, a little astonished. Why had Aveling taken so roundabout a way to reach his goal?

As he came up the avenue he met his host, who wore an anxious look. "Why, where in the world have you been?" asked Aveling. "We have ransacked the place for you." All traces of his recent gloom and passion had vanished.

"Oh! I was just rambling over the country," said Kent gayly.

"Why didn't you come for me? I like to walk. Nothing would have suited me better," said Aveling reproachfully.

Kent shot a quick glance at him. Had he forgotten their walk together?

"Well, you see," Kent went on, "I am really proud of my bump of locality, and I wanted to know if I had any grounds for pride."

"Well, did the bump work?" asked Aveling, looking much amused.

"Alas, Ned! It is not a bump. It is a dismal plain. I had to hire a small urchin to help me arrive home."

"Next time let me into your confidence and you won't need any small urchins." And Aveling affectionately tucked his hand into Kent's arm.

As they passed into the house, Kent's hopes

fell. Aveling's brow was smooth, his eye untroubled; he looked the picture of content and health. But Kent could glean no aid from him about the child who suddenly loomed so large in Aveling's problem. For events which had passed within the hour had been wiped completely from his mind, as a wet sponge cleans a slate!

CHAPTER XII

THE BIRTHDAY

WHEN dinner was over, they all went out and walked up and down the terrace. The air was heavy with the scent of potted plants, placed thickly along the brick-paved terrace. Pale flowers gleamed in the purple dusk. The rising moon threw a silver glory over the stone façade of the castle. The edge of the battlements overhead cut a jagged line in the dark-blue sky, where the stars were marshalling.

There was not much conversation. Mrs. Aveling was unusually quiet, and Kent was busy with the afternoon's occurrence. Whatever the loss of memory might mean, it at least checked his impulse to question Ned.

At a word from Aveling, their walk extended out to the avenue, barred with lines of black and silver in the moonlight. Aveling kept up a light flow of talk. Kent's replies were few and absent. Mrs. Aveling soon felt the chill of the evening air, and they turned again to the castle. Kent halted, for a moment, and ran his eye over the old gray walls. The lamplight glowed through

the casements like shapes of gold and crimson. The cheerful light seemed to sharpen the tang in the air, which spoke of autumn.

"The winter will soon be on us," said Kent. Aveling did not speak. "Let me see," he went on. "You have a birthday soon, Ned."

Aveling regarded him with gloomy eyes. "Yes, I have a birthday soon," he said, and, without another word, walked into the house.

A fire was blazing in the Red Parlor when they entered. Mrs. Aveling sat down before it and held up her hands to warm them. She wore a dark dress that fitted closely. Lines of white ran round her neck and wrists. Kent noticed the nervous fineness of her hands as the firelight played over them. As he glanced at her face, half in shadow, it struck him that she had grown thin since he came to England. There was a weary look upon her face and a drooping of her whole figure. She looked passive, almost indifferent, making absent movements, as if in deep reverie.

Kent turned away. He always had a guilty feeling when he saw her like this. There was something unprotected about her, as if her guard had slipped. He began to examine a small picture on the wall, a water-color sketch of the Roman Forum. Aveling had picked up a newspaper.

"Ned, have you been to Rome?" asked Kent.

"No. We have not been out of England.

Why?" The last word had an unexpected sharpness.

"Oh! I'll have to be trudging along soon. I want to see Rome and Venice before I go home, and thought, perhaps, you could give me some fatherly advice."

The silence which followed was so impressive that Kent looked in some surprise at Aveling, who burst into a harsh laugh. The newspaper clattered to the floor.

"Nonsense, nonsense,—what are you talking about?" he said brusquely. He was visibly shaken. He got up and stirred the fire, and, after a few restless movements, sat down in his chair. He caught up the newspaper and began deliberately to tear it into fine bits.

Kent had not moved. He heard a slight rustle of Mrs. Aveling's silk garments. Masking his surprise, he turned to her. She had moved in her chair. All of her apathy had vanished. Every line of her was tense with a helpless dread. Her steady, imploring gaze held him like a magnet. Her lips were moving, as if she were trying over words. "You mustn't think of going,—we expect a long visit." The deadly anxiety in her face did not escape into her voice; it was the usual low, sweet music. The contrast between the two was horrible. It was as if above a grave a child sang.

Kent came forward with an easy swing and dropped into a chair. "Oh, don't flatter yourselves. I shall probably stay for several years," he said carelessly. "I was only about to remark, in order to relieve your minds, that I didn't mean to *live* here."

But his humorous words found no response in Aveling, whose mood grew irritable. He snatched up the torn paper and put it in the fire, crushing it down among the embers. Kent cast about for a harmless subject of conversation. He glanced at Aveling's spare form outlined by the fire.

"By the way, Ned, why is this room called the 'Red Parlor'?" There was not a single red article in it.

Aveling started. "How do I know?" he snapped out. He strode to a curtained doorway, and, dragging the curtains viciously aside, disappeared. "Prince of blunderers!" Kent was saying to himself.

Mrs. Aveling stepped in front of him. "Have you not noticed the marks upon the wall?"

Kent sprang up at the slightly imperious motion of her hand and followed her to the south wall of the room. Here and there were dark-red stains. Mrs. Aveling did not look at Kent.

"We do not know the meaning of the name," she said. "But we have always felt that it must have some connection with these spots."

"Perhaps they are caused by dampness," suggested Kent.

"Nothing seems to affect them." She spoke absently, still regarding the mysterious spots. Kent made a sudden resolution.

"I am sorry if I annoyed Ned," he said, in a low voice.

She paled a little. "You will annoy him still more if you talk of going away," with a quick shift of her intent look. There was a return of that still intensity at the fireside. Kent studied the spots.

"You see, I was meanly calculating a series of visits to Roxmoor," he said. "And I didn't want to become a bore the first time."

Mrs. Aveling's hands began to work. She did not answer. He turned a sharp look upon her. Her manner seemed to invite confidence.

"Mrs. Aveling, won't you——"

She broke through his words. "No—I couldn't think of it. There are so many things we planned to do. Come and I'll tell you all about it." She paused a moment, and then said deliberately, "Ned has a birthday soon, you know," and led the way to the fireside, talking volubly. Her color had risen and her nervous, flurried movements showed some dread of further questioning.

In a few moments Kent heard a curtain draw

aside. He gave no sign, but he knew that Aveling had returned and quietly taken a seat.

“Balked again,” ran Kent’s musing. “Whom can I tackle now? And, above all, who shall tell me why they seem so interested in my staying for that birthday?”

CHAPTER XIII

A VOICE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

THE next morning Kent found Aveling on the terrace.

“ ‘Ain’t you ’shamed, you sleepy-head?’ ” quoted Aveling, with a laugh.

“Am I late?” As Kent’s glance went upward, he noticed that Aveling’s hair was turning gray. The blue shadows about his features sharpened the contrast of his careless mirth.

“I don’t know whether you are late or I am early. It is all in the point of view. I got up and took a gallop across the downs. It’s glorious out there.”

He looked across the track of his early ride, whistling softly to himself. “Kent, it’s a crime to waste such a day as this. I feel a rise of the pagan in me. What do you say to a day in the open, with the birds, and the fishes, and so on?”

Kent readily agreed, and they set off for a day’s fishing in the fine trout streams that tumbled through the northern border of the manor lands. When they returned, tired and trium-

phant, at the end of the day, they found Mr. Bateson, the family lawyer. He had come down from London with some things for Aveling's attention. Aveling grasped his hand with a quite un-English effusion. His voice rang; he shouted boyishly of the day's sport. Mr. Bateson was plainly amazed.

Kent looked on with some amusement at the baffled lawyer. He had evidently never seen Aveling in good spirits, and they ran unusually high to-night. Even the statuesque servants, decorously serving the dinner, were human, as an occasional sidelong glance or a quivering muscle showed. Mrs. Aveling looked relieved, as if she had temporarily slipped a weight. She had been in her room all day with a headache, and only left it to appear at dinner, retiring immediately after. Aveling and Mr. Bateson went into the small study where the business concerning the estate was carried on, leaving Kent alone in the Red Parlor.

He stretched himself out in an armchair, enjoying the sensuous repose after the day's sport. He was thinking of the alarmed confusion which the mere suggestion of his leaving Roxmoor had produced last night in both Aveling and his wife. There was an incomprehensible seriousness about it. It seemed as if his visit were of some importance to them. If they wanted his services,

why did they not speak plainly about it? Why was there any mystery?

Aveling's voice broke into his reverie.

"Here, you jack-o'-dreams, wake up!"

Kent lazily turned his head.

"Just stir your wits and talk to Bateson awhile. I must go and see about Aline;" and he disappeared. The bright, merry face pervaded every corner of Kent's being like soothing oil.

Mr. Bateson advanced into the room and seated himself opposite Kent. He did not imitate Kent's supine ease, but sat stiffly upon a straight chair and interlaced his fingers. He carried his head with judicial dignity.

"This is your first visit to England?" with an upward lift of his expressionless voice.

Kent said it was. He was wondering if it were possible to pump this very dry gentleman.

"I hope you like our country." There was the faintest possible feeling in his even tones.

Now, why the deuce does he hope I like his country? thought Kent. He decided to try to pump, anyway.

"Oh, yes,—immensely. But such a short visit as mine doesn't allow me to see much of it."

The stiff figure became stiffer.

"I understood you intended to make—quite an extended visit—quite extended," said Mr. Bateson, with an apologetic cough.

"Well, perhaps it is—relatively," said Kent, with elaborate indifference.

Mr. Bateson coughed again.

The old bird is warming up, thought Kent, as he saw the dry face opposite kindle with a purpose.

"I shall stay a few weeks, and then go over to the Continent," said Kent lazily.

Mr. Bateson shifted his position. "Well, I hope you won't go for awhile," with solemn reflectiveness. "You seem to have done Mr. Aveling good." A sharp, meaning glance met Kent's, purposely a little vacant.

"Done Ned good? Why, how?" he said, lifting his head and studying the fire.

"Mr. Aveling has seemed a little—depressed." Bateson waved his hand in deprecation. "It is a great responsibility,—and he left many friends, no doubt," he finished blandly.

"You didn't call him exactly 'depressed' to-night?"

The lawyer was evidently absorbed by his surprise at it. "I never saw him like that before," he said, with unexpected feeling. He met Kent's keen gaze squarely. "Better stay as long as you possibly can, Mr. Kent. Better stay," he repeated; "better stay. Mr. Aveling may need——" He cleared his throat.

For a full moment each one gazed into the

very soul of the other and saw there things the tongue could not frame.

Neither one saw the door swing silently ajar; but both leaped from their chairs as a hollow, pompous voice from the Middle Ages broke upon their startled ears.

"It is meet that I should tell you the hour waxeth late and we must be about betimes when morning breaks. Roxmoor is grim, mayhap, but her battlements and grated doors can promise sleep and rest to those within her walls."

An imposing figure stood before them. It was Aveling, but overlaid by a power seeking dominance, against which he seemed to struggle. Two separate natures warred for mastery of the familiar frame. The harsh, deep tones seemed rusty from long disuse. The glitter in his eyes appalled the two silent men. He turned about. "What, ho, without!"

Bateson glanced hurriedly around. Aveling's back was turned; his pompous dignity and sonorous call charged the very air with a current of antique flavor. Bateson put out a long, stealthy hand and rang the bell. In a few moments a servant appeared in the doorway. A flash went over his face, instantly suppressed. He listened to his weird orders.

Kent studied the impassive servant. This apparition was not new to him. He turned to Bate-

son,—the dry, quizzical face was watching him. Bateson shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to extend his conversation of the early evening.

They now became aware that Aveling was bidding them a most stately good-night. There was nothing to do but go, bent by the wind of that imperious compounding of personalities. Mr. Bateson gave Kent a most penetrating look as they separated in the corridor. "Better stay, Mr. Kent. Better stay." His thin figure melted away in the gloom.

Kent went on to his room; but he halted on the threshold, and, after a moment's hesitation, turned and swiftly retraced his steps, knocking at Mr. Bateson's door. It was presently opened and the small, dry face of the lawyer looked out.

"I came to ask why, Mr. Bateson, you think I'd better stay."

Bateson threw the door wide open. "I think I can give you the most urgent reason," he said. "Come in."

CHAPTER XIV

A TALE OF FATE

“ARE you a man of courage, Mr. Kent?”

This rather unexpected question produced a slight smile. “I don’t think I ever considered the matter,” said Kent. “But it’s safe to say that I am not easily knocked about.”

Bateson did not immediately go on, and Kent spoke again. “Does it require any notable courage?”

Bateson nodded. “I think so,” he gravely replied, asking with a sudden change of tone, “Do you know anything of Roxmoor’s history?”

“Scarcely anything. It was never of any interest to me until I came here and found Aveling entangled in it. In fact, I had a rather close brush with the mystery the very first night I came. At least, it is a mystery to me. I suppose there is something in the family archives to explain it.”

“Not to our satisfaction. We know nothing of the reason for the doom of Roxmoor,” he said, with solemn emphasis.

Kent looked up sharply. "Doom?" he repeated.

"It is an ugly word," said Bateson, "and yet the only one which fitly describes the strange story of the Avelings. For it is a weird tale of Fate, which neither man nor time can placate,—a grim and awful destiny which mocks with swelling coffers the slow crushing of a House."

The solemn words had an ominous meaning, which dazed Kent for a moment. "Is there any danger threatening Ned?" he asked incredulously.

"A very grave and serious danger."

"Connected, I presume, with his strange spells."

Bateson nodded. "It is there the danger lies. I will go back a little. The prosperity of the Aveling family began in the time of Henry IV. The Lord Aveling of that period was a pious man of great influence, and from his day the family was rich and powerful. In the colonial era a younger son went to America and founded that branch of the family. Why he left home is not quite clear. But it is fair to assume that he was not unmindful of the blight that crept slowly across the manor. For, some time before he crossed the sea, a tradition of ill-luck had been imported into the family history,—the black fruit of the unmistakable disaster which befell the Avelings."

"Loss of fortune, do you mean?"

"Quite the contrary. For this ill-luck had a curious limitation. It did not extend beyond the lives of the hapless Avelings. The ancient lands and wealth remained untouched. Indeed, the family possessions increased at a pace that called wondering attention to the fast diminishing holders of it. It was remarked by every one that their lives grew shorter; while, under the growth of modern science, the average mortal span has lengthened."

"And was there no reason for this?" Kent asked.

"None whatever. The place is healthy, there has always been ample wealth, and no wearing responsibility."

He paused a moment, and then went on:

"It is one thing to die in the fulness of years or for some reason of physical unfitness. But to be submerged in a period of gloom and snatched away in mysterious death is a destiny to test the courage even of a man like Mr. Aveling!"

"Death?" ejaculated Kent.

"Yes. For a terrible isolation is set upon the master of Roxmoor. The heir who succeeds is seen to become pale and spiritless and fade slowly out of existence. Unless, in the course of time, he meets a quicker and more mysterious end."

Kent was staring at Bateson. "I don't understand," he said thickly. "How can Aveling die? He is young, and in perfect health. You surely are under some mistake."

"Mr. Kent, as soon as the allotted time has passed, Mr. Aveling will die. There is no help for him. Seven times in seven years I have seen the master of Roxmoor laid away."

Kent started forward, grasping his chair. "You must be mistaken," he said, with white, set lips.

"There is no room to be mistaken," said Bateson solemnly. "The fatal change set in at once. I know it sounds like a fantastic dream, but, when I took the message to Mr. Aveling, I was shocked to see the alteration printed on his careless face. There came at once faint foreshadowings of the familiar change which made this strange face like the well-known ones I had seen grow dark and sphinx-like in the shadows of Roxmoor. I started for the steamer, horrified and shaken. For I have been long in the family councils, but never before has the doom of Roxmoor taken such fearful strides."

Kent's attention was riveted on the old lawyer's face as he proceeded with his tale.

"This was sufficiently alarming. But the ominous change had grown with hideous rapidity when I saw, some days after his arrival here, what,

to my startled eyes, appeared to be the late master of Roxmoor rising to greet me in the sombre splendor of the great library. The face I thought was dead lived before me in strange immortality."

"But what does it mean?" gasped Kent.

"It means extinction for the house of Aveling. What fate presides over their tragic destiny, I do not know. But their doom is fixed, for Mr. Aveling is far upon the fatal way, and with him the race dies."

Kent sat huddled together, gray-faced and silent. Bateson's words sent a searching light over the mysterious conduct of Aveling's friends. The doom of Roxmoor was accepted without question by them all, and they were apparently waiting in sorrowful acquiescence for the end.

But Kent was not of that mould. There was a stubborn resolution carved upon his still face. "You think that Mr. Aveling's case is hopeless?" he said, in set tones.

The lawyer bent his head.

"Have you no theories to offer?" Kent's voice was gathering depth and passion.

Bateson spread out his hands. "There are the facts. I do not care to go beyond them."

"Do you mean to let him die without a blow?"

"I am ready to give him any aid, but none lies within my line of vision. I have grown old in their service and have found, through many

years, that we can only wait for an inevitable end."

Kent suddenly rose to his feet. "Well, that may seem to be wise and right to you. I quarrel with no one in such a matter. But for me? I refuse to follow the old tradition. With your help, if it may be,—without, if it must be,—I mean to know the reason for Roxmoor's doom."

A slight relaxation played about the lawyer's carefully drilled features. "What do you propose to do?" he quietly asked.

"I haven't the least idea. But this terrible result must have some cause, and I mean to find it."

Bateson fixed a pair of keen eyes on the young man's resolute face, and, for a moment, he might have seemed to doubt that the well-known fate of Roxmoor could hold dominion against such an indomitable will. But his words destroyed the illusion. He spoke with a kind of sternness. "The Maker of the universe saw fit to give to every man empire over his destiny, and no one will withhold you now. But it is only fair to put within your grasp the power to knowingly choose your fate. You may not be aware of the danger which interference brings. Let me just hint,—it might be possible for a too rash courage to share Mr. Aveling's fate," he said meaningly.

Kent looked steadily into the keen face; and

then, rising to all his superb height, he hurled his defiance to the wild fates handling Aveling's destiny: "Neither things visible nor invisible shall hinder me. Whatever his destiny has been, I have always shared it. Whatever it may be, I am willing to share it still, for I'll travel in league with devils, if need be, to rescue a man whose life I hold dearer than my own!"

CHAPTER XV

THIRTY-FIVE!

WHEN Kent descended to the Red Parlor the next morning, they were all waiting for him. The lawyer's dry reserve made him more remote than ever. Mrs. Aveling, although a little pale, had recovered, and Aveling was in good spirits. There was another interview between the master of the house and Bateson, while Kent was left to his own communings.

His thoughts returned at once to the conversation with Mr. Bateson, with a sense of horror scarcely less than the first shock. But, in spite of this mysterious recital, he felt fresh hope. He had, at least, solid ground beneath him. Ned's alterations betokened a real and threatening crisis in Roxmoor's history, which, judging from Mrs. Aveling's words, had some close connection with the Italian Wing. Kent sprang to his feet, anxious to contrive a search of those closed rooms. Aveling was safely entangled with Bateson. It might be possible to make the visit now without discovery.

He slipped cautiously up the stairs. By some happening the locked door through which he had been taken the first day stood open, and Kent went through. He walked through several corridors, rambling on until he found himself in a hallway he did not recognize. He carefully reconnoitred the passage. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps rattling down the corridor, the swift feet of a man in deadly haste. Kent withdrew into a corner as Aveling sped by. His deathly pallor utterly changed him. He was breathing heavily and labored for a hastier progress. Mr. Bateson, carrying an unlighted taper in his hand, followed at a discreet distance. Both men were gone in an instant. Kent started hastily forward, catching a glimpse of Mr. Bateson in the distance. But they were lost again to view by another turn in the corridor, and Kent gave up the hopeless pursuit. He returned to the Red Parlor, pondering the significance of Aveling's quest, which he conjectured must end in the Italian Wing. He did not have a chance to speak to Mr. Bateson alone again, but, when the lawyer took his leave, Kent saw that entreaty, "Better stay!"

The day the old lawyer departed a fit of lowered spirits descended upon Aveling. It appeared there had been some stirring-up of musty family records in their interviews, something connected

with the Italian Wing. In two days Aveling was a changed man. Life and volition seemed to depart together. Mrs. Aveling redoubled her watchfulness. In his relaxed condition a cold, of unusual severity, developed, and Dr. Warren was summoned. Kent, by chance, passed him in the hall, where he was depositing his hat and gloves. There was more than professional dignity in the grave, concerned face he wore. "Oh, Mr. Kent, where will I find you when I come down? I thought you might like to hear of Mr. Aveling."

Kent admired his Oriental calm. "I will be here," he returned, from the doorway of the Red Parlor. The doctor mounted the stairs.

"Now, what do you suppose he wants to ask me, or tell me, or whatever is the object of his inquisitorial activity?" Kent asked of a bronze sphinx, glimmering in a dusky corner. The sphinx returned no answer, and Kent was obliged to wait for the advent of the doctor, who presently entered the room with his stooping gait.

"Mr. Aveling's cold is not so severe as I expected to find it," he observed, as he took a seat.

"And Mr. Aveling?"

"Well, Mr. Aveling has not enjoyed good health since he came to England." He stopped abruptly. "Was he a well man in America?"

"Perfectly well, always."

The doctor nodded gravely.

"How old is Mr. Aveling?" he asked, after a pause, leaning toward Kent.

"Let me see——" Kent ran over a few dates. "Thirty-five."

Dr. Warren's grave face became stern. Some unaccountable impulse prompted Kent. "How old was the late master of Roxmoor?"

"Thirty-five."

Something forced him on, some awful chill of the soul. "And the heir before?"

"Thirty-five."

Kent's blood began to freeze. Dr. Warren answered his next unspoken question. "They all die at thirty-five!"

The death-bells boomed in Kent's ears. Dr. Warren's face grew old.

"Of what did the late Mr. Aveling die?" asked Kent's husky voice.

"He was found dead."

"In bed?"

"No, in the picture gallery." There was the faintest expectation in his voice. "Have you seen the gallery?"

"No, I have not."

Dr. Warren's face twitched a little. He interlocked his fingers. "There is a portrait of an ancestor, dressed in the robes of a Knight Templar, hanging there. Mr. Aveling was found lying

beneath it." There was something horrible to Kent in his cool precision.

"Did you say that Mr. Aveling is *exactly* thirty-five?" The quiet face gleamed with keen interest.

"No. He will be thirty-five on the first day of November."

The doctor nodded. The Fates drove hard!

A blinding light suddenly broke over Kent. He started up in tense interest. "Where is the gallery situated, Dr. Warren?"

"In the Italian Wing!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE PICTURE GALLERY

KENT was stupefied and failed to notice Dr. Warren's keen survey. He looked up startled as the doctor sharply spoke his name.

"Mr. Kent, I feel that I have a duty to you, as well as to the master of Roxmoor. Bateson tells me that you mean to interfere between Mr. Aveling and his fate." He came to an abrupt pause.

"I certainly shall," said Kent cheerfully.

"Then I must use my authority to stop you."

"Me! Keep me from helping Aveling! Why, man, there is nothing born of woman that can stop me."

"It is a sin to throw your life away," said Dr. Warren. "Mr. Aveling is doomed, and to venture too far with him is merely to step into the gulf."

"Step in! Why, I mean to jump in, if it's necessary."

Dr. Warren bent a long, troubled gaze upon him. "I admire your wonderful courage, but I

must insist. I shall alarm your American friends, unless you will be more cautious."

Kent pulled himself up. "Dr. Warren, keep the cable hot clean around the world. Summon every respectable Kent you can lay your hands on. But not even the sainted dead can shake my resolution."

Dr. Warren gave him an astonished look. "Have you no regard for the sacredness of human life?" he sternly asked.

"Yes—too much to see Aveling lost," Kent stubbornly returned.

"But no one can save Mr. Aveling. It is a fatality nothing can avert," said Dr. Warren, with a touch of impatience.

"I can't agree with that," said Kent. "I have given the subject the deepest consideration and gone searchingly into the facts, and I solemnly tell you Aveling can be saved."

"Surely you misapprehend the situation," exclaimed Dr. Warren. "You *cannot* help Mr. Aveling. You'll only compass your own destruction."

"If you'll shift your point of view, you'll see what I mean. I believe we are on the verge of discovery," said Kent, with deep feeling.

Dr. Warren glanced sharply at him. "Why?"

"Aveling declares the power upon him to be a personality. Now it is not difficult to contrive

one. I have, for instance, built one out of some observations of my own; the sinister face which I saw twice; the guilty conscience which chained Aveling one night in the little chapel; the memory of religious pilgrimage I roused by playing an old song, and some personal experiences of my own. All these things lie within the scope of one personality, and, when I know his name, I'll strike the trail that leads out."

Dr. Warren was regarding him with an anxious face. "You puzzle me, Mr. Kent. No one has ever before tried to deal with these things in this way."

"That is where I hope for success. I have a theory to hang my facts upon; that is why they seemed insignificant before."

"And what is your theory?" asked Dr. Warren, with a lift of interest.

"That we are on the borders of another world in this mystery of Aveling's."

Dr. Warren discreetly lowered his eyes. "You believe that it is the dead trying for communication?"

"With as much conviction as I believe in my own existence."

"And what is your ground for this—disturbing belief?" he said, in tones of disapproval.

"I have no grounds in logic or experience. But the known and tangible can furnish no relief

for this strange situation at Roxmoor. And, as the universe is governed by law to its smallest atom, I mean to invade the world enclosed within these physical facts, for there, I believe, are forged the fetters that bind Aveling."

Dr. Warren fell back in his chair, regarding Kent with an expression of mingled belief and doubt. "Young man, from what well of miracles do you draw such wonderful draughts of inspiration? I can feel myself, old as I am, tingle with hope for a man I *know* is doomed."

Kent's face lit. "Come with us," he said gently, "and we will *show* you miracles and prove your hope."

Dr. Warren sighed heavily and looked down.

"Frankly, I would stop you if I could; but your young blood overpowers my slow caution. I can only earnestly counsel you to warn your friends."

"I am grateful for your interest in me," Kent returned, "but I think we'll let the Kents rest in peace. For some reason I feel impelled to believe that Ned's chief mission in the world is to break this ancient spell, and perhaps a generous fate allows me to share his triumph. I shall not alarm my friends, but I do most earnestly ask your help."

After a moment Dr. Warren, with a movement of rare impulsiveness, held out his hand. "You

rouse some strange confidence that you may be right. I cannot follow you; I belong to an older generation. But I'll help you as far as my powers take me."

With a feeling of cheer and hope, Kent began a close watch for the unseen personality that hung over Aveling. September went out wet and cold, and the weather settled down in a steady drizzle that shut the small circle within the gray walls of Roxmoor. One afternoon Mrs. Aveling sat busy, apparently, with some sewing. Aveling, stretched at full length in an easy-chair by the window, looked out at the blurred landscape. Everything was wet and dripping. His disconsolate mood broke into words. "Did you ever see anything more dreary than that?" he remarked.

"Do you know, I have the queer taste to like a rainy day," said Kent, joining him at the window. "See what a delicate mixture of color there is,—hues of lilac and green and here and there touches of gold and flame."

Something about Aveling seemed feebly to respond to his words. He noticed it, and went on:

"Now, look at those rolling banks of fog and fancy a gray tapestry."

Kent felt something like the touched string of a violin as he spoke. Aveling's discontent was fading.

"The trees and shrubbery lose their form. One might fancy them to be nymphs and fauns."

The gleam of a new mood peeped out from Aveling's changing face, like a wild thing watching. He closed his eyes and sank into his chair.

"Do you suppose those old tapestry-makers got ideas from things like these?" he said dreamily, as if in slumber. He settled still further into his chair, his eyelashes swept his cheeks. He did not answer when Kent bent over and anxiously called his name. His eyes unclosed after a minute or two had passed and he sat up, looking about as if perplexed. He rose and took a step forward, wavering uncertainly, and then seemed to fall into the rhythm of some onward movement. He started for the stairway with jerky motions.

What—what have I done? thought Kent, in despair. He saw that Mrs. Aveling had risen. A spool rolled from her lap and crashed against the woodwork. Aveling did not notice. He went on. Mrs. Aveling's face was ghastly, the tokens of the inevitable were upon it. She turned to Kent. With a slight motion of her head toward the toiling figure halfway up the stairs, she directed a meaning look at him. He understood and followed Aveling. As he sprang up the stairs his last glimpse left her still standing, her hands dropped at her side. There was something about

her that spelled disaster. He remembered, with a thrill, that this might be the fulfilment of his own prediction that they were on the verge of a revelation.

He followed Aveling, watching closely the steps that grew steadily more assured. They passed up the wide staircase and along the corridors, striking off into the old, main portion of the castle, now seldom visited. The ceilings grew lower, the faded decorations and battered carvings were ornate, until Kent realized that they were approaching the Wing occupied by the lonely Italian. Aveling applied a key to one of the doors. Instead of the rusty movement of unused hinges, it swung easily under Aveling's touch, as if frequently opened. As he pushed the door shut after they passed through, Kent noticed the shifting, dull fire in his face. It was not the subdued passion that so often swayed him, but a brooding, haunted reminiscence.

The apartment in which they stood must have been flooded with sunshine in good weather. Even the mists straggled through the southern windows with an effect of gray sunshine, tempered by the silence within the room, and mute evidences of bygone splendor. Aveling moved on to the southern wall of the room, and Kent saw the train of association his chance words had touched.

They stood before a magnificent tapestry of

Italian make. Aveling ran his eyes over the medley of tints and contours. There was joy in the kindling face that explored the half-barbarous, sylvan life portrayed,—colors and forms blent by the art of a country at its best; Italy, with every resource in her grasp, weaving the fabric of a rich and splendid dream.

Aveling began to speak in a low, hurried monotone,—invocations to powers invisible. He moved restlessly on, pausing before a window, a nicked statue, a picture hanging in the half-lights,—only to take up again his unresting, onward march. Kent noticed that his movements were erratic, as of a person endeavoring to find a hidden portal and meeting failure. Instead of a battle against invasion, the aspect his struggle so often wore, it seemed like the uncertain motion of one who seeks.

They passed through the various rooms of the suite, until Aveling turned into the dim light of a bedroom, pausing before a picture sunk in the wall. An ancient curtain, swept to one side, indicated that the sight of it was sometimes painful to a pair of eyes long since vanished. On a shelf beneath several tall candlesticks bore the traces of burnt-out candles, which, together with the crucifix and rosary that lay beside them, gave the place the appearance of a shrine.

As Kent stepped to Aveling's side he became

conscious of a thrill, as if a strong, magnetic current exhaled from the person at his side. There was a subtle, yet cutting, impress of a powerful personality, as of one richly endowed with powers seldom grasped by the small circle of one human soul. Aveling was drinking in the picture on the wall with the eagerness of a man gazing upon the treasure of his life.

Kent endeavored to follow that eagle gaze, but the dim nimbus of shade that hung round the picture allowed nothing more than the assurance of its being a woman's portrait. A long string of pearls, a soft-brown head, the gleaming column of a white throat, and a sweep of white drapery were all that the blurred and faded canvas gave up to the most searching gaze.

Kent forebore to rupture Aveling's abstraction. But, to his relief, a long-drawn sigh fell from him. He watched to see the cloud fall. Aveling ran his hand across his forehead and, turning, glared upon Kent with unseeing eyes, moving past him noiseless as a shadow.

Now his movements dropped their indecision. With rapid motions he drove back through the echoing rooms, turning corners so abruptly that several times he struck the wall. Once his head crashed against a projecting screen. Kent suppressed a cry with difficulty; but Aveling failed to notice it. He was moving eagerly toward an

open door, and passed through without a pause. Kent followed, halting on the threshold, for, to his stupefaction, it was the picture gallery.

When Kent entered the room he saw that to one side, still as one of the painted women on the wall, waited Mrs. Aveling. She stood to one side of Aveling's path, who drove on, unnoticing, coming to a standstill before a portrait of a woman. With all the difference made by the flood of light enveloping it, Kent could see that it was the counterpart of the one hanging in the deserted chamber. The dimly-seen drapery was a brilliant robe of white, touched with bands of gold and rose. The white throat gained light from the strings of lustrous pearls. The brown head was a glory of dull gold, and the pure oval of the delicate face was but a setting for the wide, deep eyes which carried in their depths the charm of the Mona Lisa.

But what was the other magnetic current flowing from them? In what fair dream had he seen eyes like that? Eyes that in an earlier time were but the promise of which these were the fulfilment.

Kent, lost in wonder, approached still closer. But the baffling mystery receded from his touch, as a form of mist eludes the grasp. He fell back a step. His eye turned to sweep the canvas next to it. A tall, bold figure of a man, magnificently

proportioned, clad in the robes of a Knight Templar, with the mien and bearing of a man bent on holy things. Kent's eye went upward, and through the mists of time and distance, with the shadow of a mystery, stood forth the image of his boyhood friend. From the high, polished brow swept back a curving mass of hair, the crest of it just touched with white, as if a swiftly passing motion had robbed its color. Kent recoiled as he met a pair of glittering, demoniac eyes, in which lurked a cowering spirit, fearfully stained by some dark experience, yet strangely hallowed by the flight of time and the consecration of scourge and fast and vigil.

Startled, he turned about. Down Aveling's face trickled a thin stream of blood, lending to his countenance a horror that removed him to a strange age and place. Some cosmic flash seemed to place on Aveling's head the blow meant for that guilty face upon the canvas.

"Good God, man! Is it you?" Kent's fearful whisper broke up Aveling's death-like quiet. A sudden fury flamed over him. He raised a pair of clenched hands and darted forward. There was murder written in every line of him.

Like a flash of light, Mrs. Aveling moved between them and, facing Aveling, raised her hand. Her resolute poise carried a command that pierced his lost self. His fury sank, he stood fas-

minated, shivering. Mrs. Aveling turned and pointed to the door, her eyes on Kent:

“Go!”

Kent looked anxiously at her stricken face.

“Can’t I help you? I——”

Her hand still pointed to the door. Her lips moved, but only the commanding eyes said “Go.” Kent went out and softly closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SECOND PERSON

KENT spent the next day alone, vainly wondering what secret those silent rooms upstairs had witnessed since they closed upon the stricken couple yesterday. He was in the Red Parlor just before the dinner hour, turning over a pile of magazines, when Mrs. Aveling came in. She looked paler than ever in the ivory-tinted dinner gown she wore. There was a chain of dull gold about her slender throat, from which hung an amethyst cross. Her careful toilette seemed a ghastly mockery. There was a straining of her eggshell outlines. Her eyes were deeper and more shadowy than ever. But, for the first time, Kent caught the sense of appeal to him—appeal for aid. How gladly he would help that brave, young heart of hers, if only he knew how.

“I am afraid you have been quite dull to-day,” she said, in low, sweet tones. “Edward has,”—she searched for a word,—“has been ill.”

Kent ventured to be a little pressing.

“Are you doing right, Mrs. Aveling, to keep

an old friend away,—when he is ill? They say I am a good nurse,” he added gently.

He could not fathom the deep look that sprang upon him like a live thing.

“I don’t know—what to do,” she said piteously, her hands clasped tightly together. She looked childish and helpless, a pathetic contrast to the commanding figure that held in check the fury of Aveling’s passion in the old gallery.

“Has he had the doctor?” asked Kent, uncertain what next to say.

“No, he doesn’t need—the doctor.” Her words ended in a painful pause. Didn’t need the doctor? Then Aveling was *not* ill.

“Dear Mrs. Aveling, if you will let an old friend help, perhaps we can do much.”

“He *reads* too much—he *thinks* too much,” she said, with sudden emphasis. “Don’t you think it is injurious to read too much?” Her eyes fairly burned into Kent’s. A slight flush sprang upon her cheeks, which, together with the unnaturally brilliant eyes above them, gave her face a staring fixity.

Kent sank back, baffled. There was something in her look that chilled his blood; because he realized that, for some reason, she could not put in words the thing that gnawed at her. And yet every line of her begged, implored his aid.

She started violently, her whole being shivered. "Hush! He is coming."

Kent had not heard a sound, but for several minutes neither one moved. The door swung noiselessly ajar, and through it emerged the very counterpart of the figure Kent had seen enclosed within the darkened frame upon the gallery walls. The Templar garb, the austere mien, the slight touch of white upon the wavy hair, as if a hand had swept across it and left its impress.

Kent, with a curious repulsion, met his gaze, and then fell back in horror. The personality for which he had so unweariedly searched glittered from the steady eyes bent upon him, for the Aveling Kent knew had utterly vanished!

CHAPTER XVIII

A BROKEN SILENCE

THE following afternoon Kent vainly racked the old manor-house for entertainment. Except for the brief appearance of Mrs. Aveling at breakfast, he had been alone the entire day, and time dragged by interminably dull and dreary. A lassitude had fallen on him that neutralized every enjoyment, and, after vain efforts spent on books and music, he stepped outside. The sky was dull and lowering, a fine drizzle fell at intervals.

After an aimless turn about the damp courtyard, he sought shelter in a small portico which overlooked a considerable portion of the garden and gave a somewhat novel view of the castle. Kent dropped heavily into a chair and stared into the foggy distance.

All the happenings since the day of his arrival passed before his mind like scenes at a play. The first shock of Aveling's changed face; the strange transformation which befell Aveling on reaching Roxmoor, and his weird disappearance, followed by the elusive chain of events which culminated,

step by step, in last night's astounding revelation. For so it stood in Kent's mind as the key to occurrences which otherwise seemed like the vagaries of a disordered brain. His expectations had been fully carried out. Aveling was not merely under the spell of an historic place, nor was he the victim of a senseless curse. He was dominated by a person, and that a man defined in last night's ghastly change as one of the ancient lords of Roxmoor.

In taking leave of commonly accepted belief about Roxmoor's doom, Kent cut himself aloof from much friendly aid and counsel. All of Aveling's friends heard of Kent's theories with stoic disregard. This he did not greatly mind. But it was necessary to secure Ned's co-operation at this point, and he knew no way to set about it. He must know something more than Bateson told him about the Lord Aveling who chose so strange a method of return. For this was clearly not an ordinary case of double consciousness. It bore a deeper significance than the shifting of the elements of personality. It was the intrusion of another man for a purpose; and in that motive, Kent believed, lay the explanation of the whole phenomenon.

So much was clear in the mystery before him. For once admit the possibility of a soul's return, some reasonable motive for such a weird reversal

of life's events must exist; and this motive could have its beginning only in the dead man's life. No one seemed able to provide him with any useful information, for Bateson's knowledge was enclosed within the hard shell of his own traditions, and the facts he gave were so colored by his own beliefs as to be useless. Aveling was his only resource, and how to open up the subject with him was a matter which caused Kent much painful reflection. Aveling kept up a steady, unmoved reserve, and Kent was unable to calculate the dangers of forcing him to speech or the chances of convincing him that his, Kent's, services could be of use.

The stream of his ruminations changed their course, for he began to notice that his eye shifted continually to a glass door which opened upon the garden not far away. He wondered if anything were going on in the old gray pile at his back, and started up with a half-formed resolution to go in. But as he moved the door showed a streak of black down the side, which widened until Aveling's form appeared. He passed through and closed it noiselessly. Then he stepped down to the ground and, with the swift, serpentine motion Kent knew so well, glided down a winding pathway and disappeared beneath the arched entrance to a moss-grown tower that stood some distance away from the main structure. It

was a ghostly place, much frequented by bats and owls, and bore a tradition of a hapless monk confined there during the Middle Ages, previous to being burned at the stake. It was said to resound with groans and wails, and the spirit of the old monk walked at midnight.

Kent studied carefully its crumbling walls and the narrow slits of windows, shut in with iron gratings. An impulse to follow Aveling came to him. Just at that moment the door behind him was flung violently open, and Mrs. Aveling, with flushed face and dishevelled garments, came through. She stopped at sight of Kent, with a sharp exclamation: "Where is Ned? I know something has happened to him——" She broke off in a sob.

"He is all right; don't be frightened," said Kent soothingly. "He went into the tower just a moment ago with a book under his arm."

She glanced across to the ancient tower; a hungry yearning warped her face. She leaned wearily against the wall. "I fell asleep—I was so tired—and, when I woke, he was gone." She trembled like a leaf as she put up a hand to brush back a stray lock of hair hanging over her face.

"You needn't worry,—he is all right." Kent repeated the words.

She looked piteously at him. "I never let him

out of my sight." The tears welled up and rolled silently over her white cheeks. "I can't stand the strain much longer."

Kent bent suddenly toward her. "I wish you'd let me share your trouble. How can I help Ned?"

She drew herself together,—her eyes like wells, a frozen horror in them.

"I—don't—know."

Her hands dropped at her side like stones. She looked in her mournful beauty like a mute image of sorrow; the sad, stricken eyes resting upon the wall of stone that hid her treasure.

"Does *he* know?" ventured Kent.

She silently shook her head.

"Could he be induced to talk?" Kent asked.

"I don't know. But I wish you'd try. I believe he wants to tell you something."

Kent glanced at the tower. "Perhaps I had better go over."

"If you only would!"

Kent crossed the intervening space with quick steps, the wet gravel crunching beneath his feet. The rain had ceased, but a silvery mist sparkled upon the leaves. The lower floor of the tower was simply a rough, empty chamber, from which a flight of heavy stone steps wound to the next floor. Kent hesitated a moment, and then, advancing to the foot of the staircase, sent his deep voice echoing up the gloomy cavern. The rever-

berations woke a thousand tongues that sent back his voice strangely transformed. Aveling's face, crossed by a black-barred, gray light, suddenly started out of the shadows above.

"I couldn't find a horn to wind," Kent sang out, "so I gave an imitation in my best style. May I come up?"

Aveling's grim face relaxed in a mirthless smile. "Come along," he said shortly.

Kent mounted the steps to a small vestibule lighted dimly by a narrow slit in the wall, which had thrown the eerie light across Aveling's face. To one side another flight of steps wound upward, suggestive of other flights curving into the owl-haunted regions above. To the other, an open door gave access to a room into which Aveling beckoned Kent to come, and closed the door.

An eerie sense of being let into another person's life laid hold of Kent as his glance went round the room. The circular walls were lined with bookcases, so high that a ladder was needed to reach the topmost shelves. They were filled with the sober drab and brown of a scholar's library. At one side of the room was an arrangement of things which Kent recognized as an amateur laboratory; while in the centre stood a massive, antique table, equipped with a multitude of small drawers. The dingy green cover was littered with note-books, pens, and ink, and sheets

of paper closely filled with writing. It was the workshop of a man accustomed to hours of patient, laborious research.

Kent dared not look at Aveling, who stood with one hand resting on the table. He vainly tried to connect the grave, serious figure with the debonair associations of the past. He knew now the meaning of the slight droop of Aveling's head and the curving rise of shoulders above it—the shape of a man accustomed to work at a desk. He tried to escape the keen gaze that made effort to shackle his attention. An idea came to him. Had he been seen lounging in the porch, and did Aveling deliberately trap him here? He hastily began to speak:

“Well, this is a jolly old place.” The hollowness of his own desperate cheerfulness startled Kent himself.

“I don't—know,” came the hesitating answer. “I wouldn't call it *exactly*—jolly.”

Kent felt the cold sweat ooze from every pore. Aveling still stood motionless, eyeing Kent with the look of a man who expected him to read the message the old walls were giving to his dull senses. But Kent vainly searched for his deliverance.

A shaft of rainy sunlight broke through one of the high, narrow windows and struck into the gray gloom, pointing downward like a finger, un-

til it rested upon some rows of books, where the latticed doors stood slightly ajar. Kent instantly darted forward as if driven, not seeming to have power over his footsteps, until they ceased before the rows of illuminated shelves. A loud, quick breathing at his ear warned him that Aveling had followed.

Kent ran his eye over the titles standing clear against the dark covers,—“Principles of Psychology,” “Double Consciousness,” “Unconscious Memory,” “Bondage of the Will,” “Phantasms of the Dead.” His eye streamed on—memory—again double consciousness—double memory,—poor Aveling’s secret was unveiling itself in these harmless tomes, their dark significance leading the trail into the morass upon which Kent’s attention finally rested,—big, bold, staring letters of ghastly white that unsealed Mrs. Aveling’s dread,—“Suicide.”

Kent stood frozen to the spot with horror. Aveling was searching madly for some secret hidden within the shadow-land between the soul and its walls of clay.

Mechanically, Kent put out his hand and drew a volume from the shelf. The slight groan that came from the closely packed shelves made him start and the book tumbled to the floor. He bent over to pick it up, marvelling at his shaken nerves.

"I didn't realize that you were so interested in psychic research, Aveling," he said lightly. He leafed the book, but for his life he could not see a word. Aveling had retreated to the table. He shrank a little as Kent's lifted gaze met his.

"Old Professor Boyce—you remember him?"—Kent went on—"died and bequeathed that part of his library to me. He was always in a pet with the authorities in science, and he remarked in his will, with considerable sarcasm, that I was the only man in America who had a glimmer of reason about the new psychology——" Kent broke off, amazed at the sudden fire that flamed from Aveling as he lifted his voice in passionate speech.

"Yes—I know you are. That's why I sent for you!"

CHAPTER XIX

MARIOLA

KENT was silenced by this startling announcement. Then he had done well to defy Dr. Warren's friendly warnings.

"So I can be of use," he quietly observed, turning over the leaves of a magazine selected carelessly from a heap beside the table. "In what way?"

Kent's quiet manner and matter-of-fact words calmed Aveling. His tremor departed and his face relaxed. "To tell you the truth, I don't know, Kent," he replied. "But something is wrong with me, something threatens my life. I will go the way they all did, unless we can unravel the mystery."

Kent directed a keen glance at him. "Why do you feel so sure you will die?"

Aveling took hold of a chair with an uncertain grasp. "We all do, Kent; we all do," he said, in a high-pitched, helpless tone, as if he belonged to a band of outlaws.

"Is that the only reason?"

Aveling glanced fearfully about the circular chamber, as if they might be overheard, and, creeping silently nearer, lowered his voice, speaking rapidly. "No, there is something more. I feel my strength grow less every day. My nerves are loose as fiddle-strings, and my muscles soft and useless. Why, man,—I can't handle a pair of clubs or dumb-bells any more." He was breathless and spent, but wore the look of one relieved of a burden, as if the mere act of speech eased him.

Kent was rudely faced with a fact he had refused to see, and when he spoke it was to reassure himself. "I think you are out of practice, Ned. Let us try the effect of some regular work together."

Aveling shook his head. "I am willing to try anything, but it is of no use to hope for results from exercise. It goes too deep. Something is tapping my very life-springs." He went on after a moment's pause, "Why, Kent, I made a special point of athletics after I came here, and there has been a steady decline of strength."

Kent was startled, but did not speak until he felt Aveling's hand upon his arm. "Say, Kent—you *can* help a fellow. A man can face death, but this ghastly spinning around a whirlpool——" He broke off, shivering violently.

Kent looked quietly into the blanched counte-

nance. "Yes, Ned. I am sure there is a way to help you, and we'll never rest until we find it. But, first, I'd like to have a little talk about this ancestor of yours whose portrait you so strongly resemble."

"The resemblance is not the strangest part," said Aveling. "Every reigning heir, after a short residence here, begins to look like that portrait. It has been observed over and over."

"Well, then, that furnishes a beginning," said Kent.

"Ah! but the next step is the difficulty. We never get to that."

"But don't you see, Aveling, that all these strange occurrences centre about a personality; and that every incident identifies it with the old Templar. Now there must be a reason for this. If a former lord of Roxmoor impresses himself upon his heirs with such terrible force as to affect their very lives, there exists a cause for it. What is the feeling that you have when these seizures come?"

"That's just the trouble. I can't remember. I am only conscious of some force gripping me that is stronger than my own. Then everything is a blank until it is all over."

Kent thought a moment. It was always remorse or penance that inspired Aveling's moods. "Tell me something about this Lord Aveling,"

he said. "I questioned Bateson once or twice, but he gave me little that was of use."

"He lived during the Middle Ages," Aveling readily replied. "He became a powerful figure in the court of Henry IV, one of the king's most valued advisers, history tells us."

"There is nothing in his history to suggest any reason for remorse?"

"Not the least," said Aveling, in evident surprise. "He was of great service to the king, and, after the death of his wife, to whom he paid a tender devotion quite out of keeping with his rude time, he became highly religious. In fact, all the records show him to be a benevolent, pious man, devoted to family, king, and country."

This baffling story tallied exactly with Bateson's tale. However, they were to make headway; it was not to be in a fresh examination of his history, but in a more careful consideration of the human elements in the problem. Incongruous as it might seem, there must somewhere be a link which would connect the memories of a pious man with a conscience that seven centuries could not rest.

He was an interesting character, this strange old man, who grew more lovable and pious as he was revealed. Kent liked the touch of finer feeling in his devotion to his wife. It must have been something rare to carry the story through

so many generations. This deviation from the common track interested Kent. He fancied her lovely and gracious, to inspire so deep a feeling. "Do you know anything about the wife for whom the Lord Aveling cared with so much tenderness?"

"Very little beyond her name. She was called the Lady Mariola."

"What an odd name! Not English, surely."

"She was an Italian." Something in the conversation vitalized Aveling's gloomy mood. He quivered with a current of life. "How would you like to see the tomb where he and his wife lie buried?" Aveling unexpectedly asked. "We might go out now."

Kent gave assent. There was some mystery in Aveling's manner, but he volunteered no further information as Kent followed him out of the tower.

The rain had now entirely ceased. The sun shone at intervals. Aveling crossed the courtyard and struck into a bypath. The woods here seemed full of a neglected and choking undergrowth, from which they emerged upon a broad path, deserted and overgrown. Weeds stood rank and high in the gravel. Wild things hopped unmolested through it. The path curved away, in one direction, to the castle; and in the other, toward a gate, rusty with disuse. To this gate Aveling directed his steps. He turned aside and,

fumbling among the bushes, applied a key to a small gate. It opened, and he stood aside to let Kent through. They came out upon a road; walking down a little distance, and then through another gate, and they were in an old cemetery.

"Do you know what that path was through which we came?" asked Aveling, with impetuous haste.

"No."

"There is a tradition that, unless the dead lord of the manor is carried down that path, he goes to an unquiet grave."

"And did any one ever violate the tradition?" asked Kent lightly.

"It has been done—just once."

The very perceptibly deepening melancholy of his mood warned Kent into silence. Aveling struck into a sharper gait, with a growing abstraction. He turned into a hawthorn path, which led to a church standing within the manor lines. The slanting light of afternoon fell gently on the time-stained walls. Aveling, growing more moody under the solemn spell of the place, pushed on into the church, a stealthy stillness marking every step. Inside, he paused before an ancient tomb, —a beautiful recumbent effigy in copper of a long-departed Aveling. With a sudden casting off of caution, Kent asked about the ancestor whose funeral train had broken family custom. Avel-

ing turned away. A few steps brought them to an ornate tomb dating from the middle centuries. Aveling let his eyes rest upon it.

“Here lies the old Lord Aveling, whose portrait hangs in the gallery and whose funeral train did not come down the path.”

Kent understood that Aveling attached some significance to the old legend. As he continued to gaze at the tomb the sense of a magnetic presence came to him, a rich and powerful personality, a pervading will and purpose that chained the senses. He tried to shake it off, but it laid hold of him with an iron clutch. There was a stir of fear in his blood that chilled the warm currents as that unseen presence tugged at him, and the strange influence that so often struck from Aveling's moods invaded his mind. There was a swift intuition of danger, as if he stood upon the brink of the abyss which was slowly engulfing the man at his side.

Aveling's manner grew more pre-occupied. He muttered uneasily and made impatient gestures, but they had a new significance. It was not the manner of a man who evades, but something more vital that yet eluded Kent's grasp. It was possible that he might have something more to tell. Aveling turned abruptly from an old monument they were examining. “Come on—let's go outside.”

Kent noticed a lightening of his countenance, a flash of smouldering fire in his eye. They passed out through a side door into the churchyard and moved among the fallen tombstones, time-stained and lichen-covered. Rosemary and rue reminded the passer-by that here lay human dust.

A chill struck through Kent as he bent over an old stone. He started slightly and looked up, to meet Aveling's piercing eyes, instantly withdrawn. Kent shook off the unpleasant impression and followed as Aveling moved away, but he was distinctly conscious of the close-kept watch upon him. They were passing a row of graves whose stones were almost hidden by small fir-trees. Aveling rapidly walked on, while Kent stooped to decipher the almost obliterated names. When Kent joined him he was standing with bared head looking down, with deep emotion, at a plain, single gravestone placed against a background of weeping willows. As Kent stepped to his side the sun dropped behind a bank of clouds, seeming to let down a pall even in that place of sorrow. Aveling smothered a cry.

He continued immovable, and Kent bent his scrutiny upon the stone. There was nothing to catch the eye, except its newness. It could not be old. Kent's searching gaze soon saw the date—less than two years old—and the name, "Mari-ola, wife of ——" The name was illegible to one

in Kent's position. The words, cut into the stone, were lost in the slightly mottled grain. But the name, "Mariola," rang in his brain with a vain effort to connect this evidently humble woman, who had recently lived, with the noble lady who was the object of the old lord's tender love.

Unable to fathom the design which had brought him here with so laborious an approach, Kent dared not question Aveling. Conscious of the shifting scrutiny that swept from the humble grave to himself and back again, he stood still and continued his quiet inspection. There was nothing to suggest the smallest clue to work upon.

"Well, shall we move on?" There was distinct disappointment in the even tones and a sickened intonation which Kent instantly divined to mean that the grave had withheld a secret. He felt sure now that this was the cemetery which Aveling brought him once before to see. He was evidently on the search for something and plainly wanted Kent to see a thing which somehow escaped him.

Aveling looked wistfully up at the sullen sky and turned reluctantly away. For the time his search was baffled. All the fire and energy departed from him. He sank into a lassitude that increased with each flagging step. Kent racked

his brain for the few characteristics of that quiet grave. He remembered Aveling's distressed outcry when the sun disappeared. The other visit had been made at this hour. Then, at the earliest opportunity he must seek that grave,—at sunset, and alone.

As they stepped into the road Aveling turned off in a new direction, which Kent judged was to lead to another entrance than the grass-grown funeral path. He was mentally turning over his recollections of the first walk to the cemetery. From what side had they approached it? He saw nothing to-day that looked the least bit familiar.

They were suddenly confronted by a little girl, shyly holding up to Aveling a basket of blackberries. It was the same child they had met before. Aveling looked at her as if confused.

"They are for you. I picked them for you," she said softly, her small face wreathed in a winning smile.

He made a violent motion. "For Heaven's sake, child, eat them yourself. I don't want them;" and, pushing roughly past her, he walked hastily away.

The child shrank as if struck, and, after a glance at the retreating figure, turned a pitiful face up to Kent. He bent over her and, taking the basket, passed his hand across her head.

"I will take the berries home to him. I know

he will be glad to have them. You mustn't mind—he is very tired to-day.”

“Is he angry? What did I do?” A tear, quivering on the long fringe of each dark eye, fell on the soft, blooming cheeks and rolled down. She put up her hand and brushed them away.

“Not a bit of it,” said Kent heartily. “Not a bit of it. I am going to give your present to him and I know he will be pleased.”

The assurance so firmly given won back the smile that so glorified her small, dark face. Kent watched her keenly for a moment, and then went on. Where had he seen that face, ennobled by time and opportunity? And why did this child appear at every turn of the road? He wheeled in his path, struck by a sudden thought. “What is your name, little girl?”

“Mariola.”

CHAPTER XX

A KEY

THE next morning a dish of blackberries was placed beside Aveling at the table. He looked sharply at his wife. "What is this?" he said, with annoyance in his tone.

"Mariola sent them to you, dear. She expressly said they were for you," returned Mrs. Aveling.

He did not look up, but put out his hand to draw them near. He ate them all, but every one was choked down an evidently unwilling throat, with the humility and significance of an act of penance.

He was spent and listless, showing little interest in anything. At Kent's suggestion Mrs. Aveling sent for the family at Melton Abbey to come in to tea, and they spent the day in quiet anticipation of that event.

In the intervals of chess and bridge, or any entertainment to which Aveling could be induced to give his scant attention, Kent's mind was busy with the curious circumstances concerned in that odd name, Mariola. He was convinced that some-

thing of vital importance lay in this apparently disconnected fact, and he stealthily hoped that it might furnish the clue they so sorely needed. The fast approaching birthday impressed him with the need for haste. Dr. Warren said they all died at thirty-five, and Aveling would reach that fatal age in seventeen days, a fact which occasioned fresh dismay to Kent, for Aveling lost strength daily. His weakness was alarming and his face was heavily lined.

The gloom that lay upon the house lifted when the party came from the Abbey, bringing Betty Cary and some other people Kent had met. He was talking with a young beauty, who had made a sensation in London during the last season, when a voice fell upon his astonished ears.

"Why, Mary Endicott," he said, putting out both his hands.

The woman he addressed was tall and handsome, with iron-gray hair and full, expressive eyes that danced as she met his effusive greeting.

"Well, it is worth while to cross the Atlantic just to receive such a welcome," she said. She turned aside to greet Aveling, who, as Kent saw, was equally surprised and pleased.

"Lady Melton, do you keep these treasures in your pockets to dazzle your friends?" said Aveling. He spoke with careless good-humor, and she made a laughing answer.

The little incident did not so easily leave Kent's mind. A fleeting look of consciousness which crossed Mrs. Aveling's face caught his attention. Mary Endicott, the cousin who had been foster-mother to Mrs. Aveling after her own mother died, must have been sent for. Kent had known her from boyhood. He was glad she was there.

The chatter around him became more lively. Some one suggested an excursion through the house. Aveling fell in with the plan at once; but Kent saw that he made the tour as short as possible, and led the way again to the great hallway, catching an excuse from some admirer of old armor. The collection in the hall was old and famous. Kent also noticed that he contrived an earnest talk with Miss Endicott, and then moved toward Lady Melton. The conversation had fallen a little, and Miss Endicott's rich voice rang out in the quiet:

"When you have grown up with an English novel in your hands, it seems as if you were returning home when you actually see the place where the scenes are laid."

"I often wonder if Americans are not more deeply touched by our garment of age than we are," said Lord Melton. His wife was talking to Kent, who closely watched her as she directed a frowning attention upon her lord.

"Possibly it is so," returned Miss Endicott. "We cannot help feeling a little green."

Lord Melton was greatly amused. "Green!" he repeated. "One would not imagine it. Do you always conceal your feelings with such notable success?"

All at once Miss Endicott was stiffened in some mood of deep abstraction. She stood near the foot of the stairway. "I am not sure," she said. A slight rigidity settled upon her. "I am not sure," she repeated with slow, mechanical lips. "I am not sure."

Lord Melton's face overspread with astonishment. He caught Lady Melton's eye. She almost imperceptibly shook her head. As they watched, Miss Endicott came to herself with a start. When her bewildered face met Lady Melton's there was a frightened, hunted look upon it.

A peal of laughter swept down from the group where Betty Cary and Aveling carried on a lively skirmish of wits that held the attention of the whole company. Miss Endicott moved quietly to Lady Melton's side. "You don't suppose he saw me," she said, in low, hurried tones. Lady Melton glanced at Aveling.

"No, he didn't hear. Betty is holding his attention," she said.

"I never dreamed it could be so awful." Miss Endicott shivered as she spoke. Her face grew

paler. "Surely it is not right to leave Aline here," she said, in imploring tones.

"We cannot persuade him to leave now. You know, when they took him to Nice, he escaped and returned alone."

Kent's alert attention became tense. Then Aveling did not tell him the truth. He *had* been out of England. Had he forgotten? There was an expression of despair on Miss Endicott's face when Kent's gaze returned to it. "Is there *nothing* we can do?" she asked.

"Nothing—but wait," said Lady Melton sadly. Her dark eyes travelled off to unconscious Aveling.

Kent studied her closely. She was looking very beautiful to-day in her gown of creamy white, touched here and there with falls of delicate lace. Her expression changed. Aveling was approaching.

"Come, Lady Melton, you must give up your booty. We are Americans and frown upon the idea of privilege and monopoly." Aveling's face was alight. He was in a bantering mood. The whole company listened in silent amusement.

Lady Melton put her head to one side and laid her hands together upon her lap. "My booty? What part of my possessions do you covet, Sir Highwayman?"

"What part? How can you pretend——" He

finished with a graceful bow to Betty and Miss Endicott.

"I vow you speak in riddles," she said.

"Very well, since you force me to such unnatural plainness," he made answer, with mock tragedy. "I make a formal demand for the two charming persons upon whom you have laid felonious hands."

A startled look came out upon the faces Kent was watching. Lady Melton's cool composure held.

"And by what right, good sir?"

"By the immortal right of the Stars and Stripes, which stand for *liberty* and *equality*," he said, with sharp emphasis.

"And the Union Jack stands for the defence of *rights* and *home*." She bent an inscrutable look upon Aveling and rose in the attitude of a challenging muse. "But come, I will make exchange. What do you offer for my prize?"

Aveling's recklessness was instantly checked by a note of deep meaning in her voice and manner.

"What will you take?" came the Yankee's answer.

"I will make a fair exchange. Give me Mr. Kent, and you may have my young ladies."

Her words crashed like a thunderbolt through the silent group. Lady Melton still held her attitude of mock challenge. Over her face played

a carefully maintained assumption of gayety. Aveling recoiled a step; he had grown pale. He made a deprecating motion with his hands.

"What would you? If I surrender the only attraction I have, how could I induce the young ladies to come?" he said quietly.

"Exactly. And how can I attract the means to beguile my solitude, if you take my snares away?"

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then Lord Melton led a storm of applause. "Come, Mr. Aveling. You were beaten in fair fight."

Aveling made a deep obeisance. "I surrender to your ladyship."

A servant carrying a tray came in, followed closely by the little girl whose name was Mariola. She looked alarmed at the size of the company and shrank back. Aveling sprang up with a look of relief and went to meet her. "I had the berries you sent me, dear. Did you gather them for me?" he asked, bending his tall form over her.

She shyly lifted her face. "Yes, sir,—if you please, sir."

Aveling led her to a seat, with the deferential gentleness he might pay a queen. Somehow it had the grotesque significance of a man endeavoring to pay a debt, as Aveling gave her his attention and plied her with sweetmeats.

Kent closely watched Aveling's interest in the child. Betty Cary had taken Mariola in her arms, and she and Aveling by turns were telling fairy-tales for her amusement. The great, tawny eyes devoured first one face and then the other. Lady Melton stood a little apart watching the group, her regard resting often, with the keenest interest, upon the child's face. Kent stepped to her side.

"One seldom sees so beautiful a face," he remarked.

"Very seldom," she returned, with nice precision.

"It is not an English face?"

"No." She seemed to reflect. "Did you ever see a face that resembled hers?"

"If I have not, I have at least dreamed of one."

Lady Melton was silent.

"I have not yet found out who she is. Do you happen to know?" he enquired.

"She is the daughter—the only child—of one of the villagers."

"And her mother lies in the cemetery," finished Kent.

Lady Melton turned a somewhat startled face upon him.

"How do you know?"

"I made a rather unexpected visit to her grave

in Aveling's company on one or two occasions."

Lady Melton regarded the child.

"She looks as if she might be an Italian," ventured Kent.

"She is of Italian descent."

Kent studied his distinguished neighbor. What answer would she give the deep question that lurked behind his lips? "Why, Lady Melton, does my friend, Aveling, who has no known connection with this child or her ancestors—why does he feel so keen an interest in her?"

Lady Melton's frank gaze met his. "That, Mr. Kent, is what we all would like to know."

Here Mariola was seen to anxiously address Aveling. "Please, Mr. Aveling, is it half an hour?"

"Since you came? Yes, I suppose it is."

She immediately slipped from her seat. "Then I must go home. Grandmother said I should stay only half an hour."

"Oh, your grandmother won't mind if you stay a little longer," said Aveling, with humorous indulgence.

"But my father would," gravely said the child. "He doesn't like it when I come to Roxmoor."

Aveling shrank a little. "Very well," he said briefly, moving as if to go with her.

Mrs. Aveling cast a perplexed look upon the

company, and then at Kent, who spoke at once:

“You needn’t take her, Ned. I’ll see her safely home.”

“I intend to take her home myself,” he said with cutting emphasis, adding in a lower tone, “It is more fitting.”

He seemed unconscious of the anxiety in Mrs. Aveling’s face. His eyes were on the child; his own expression shifting in response to some inward stirring. But only Kent heard the low-spoken words that came as if Aveling were but the mouthpiece of another man: “Guard her like your heart’s blood. She is the key!”

CHAPTER XXI

“I MUST GIVE—GIVE!”

THE next morning Kent left Aveling safely immersed in business with his agent and set off alone for the cemetery. He was feeling the inspiration of fresh hope concerning that odd name, Mariola. Aveling's half-whispered words about the child, “She is the key,” confirmed Kent's belief. If he could fathom Ned's odd connection with her and learn what it meant to him, he felt the first step would be taken. He hurried on his way. Just as he passed inside the gates, clouds crossed the sun, and, when he stood beside the grave, there was only the dull light of former visits.

The grave lay in its humble silence; a bunch of simple cottage flowers lay withering in the coarse grass. It was in its humility as far removed from Roxmoor's splendor as a thing could be. And yet Kent believed that it was a part of that vital past that still lived there. The headstone that marked the grave was curiously streaked and mottled. Kent stooped down and read the rest of the inscription,—“wife of Michel

Barotti,”—the date of birth and death, and that was all. He turned away, baffled.

With a start he faced Mariola and a tall, athletic man dressed in the garb of a laborer, yet with a countenance that showed the marks of a culture not belonging to his station. As they met, Kent saw he flushed angrily and drew Mariola to one side, with a cold and distant indication that they waited for him to pass. Confused by a feeling that he had been caught doing something wrong, Kent moved away, bowing involuntarily. At a little distance, from the shelter of a screen of trees, he saw them at the grave. They were replacing the faded flowers with some fresh ones.

After a few moments Kent started for the gate, but hastily withdrew again into the shelter of the trees. Aveling was approaching. He looked thoughtful and sad. A deep-drawn sigh escaped him as he passed Kent. A moment later he was bowing almost with humility to the man with Mariola. The child alternately smiled at and shrank from Aveling. The man spoke.

“The poor live always in the eye of the public,” he said bitterly. “Not even our griefs are sacred.”

Aveling received the scornful words unmoved.

“I offer you an apology. I had no intention of intruding,” he said, with gentle dignity. “You are Mariola’s father?”

The man bowed with a haughty grace that made Kent stare. How came a peasant to have the manner of a nobleman?

"I am also Mariola's husband," he said, pointing to the grave. "But I will wait aside until you have finished your inspection. Grief can wait upon the curiosity of the great."

A withering hate, which had been suppressed with difficulty, flamed over the man. He raised himself with an imperious lift of his giant frame that caused his stature visibly to rise. This was not the manner of a peasant to his lord, but, to Kent's amazement, Aveling did not resent his ironic words. He spoke gently. "I did not come to disturb you," he said.

"What, then, did you come for?" demanded the man, his strange passion increasing at Aveling's evident friendliness.

Aveling winced. A painful flush spread over his features. "I was—was just strolling about," he said lamely.

"So it would appear. When your stroll is ended, we may again have our dead, I suppose?"

Aveling's face was red and working. With a stammered word or two he turned away and feebly set off in the direction of the gate.

Kent waited for a while, not daring to follow home too closely. The two figures again worked quietly at the grave. Mariola stole an occasional,

troubled look at her father, who spoke to her from time to time with the gentlest words.

On his homeward walk Kent vainly puzzled over the animosity of the man and could think of no reason why Aveling's presence should rouse such anger. Nor did he receive any help from Aveling, who was in a mood of quiet melancholy when they met, and made no mention of the encounter.

The day passed quietly away. Aveling was apparently wrapped in thought; and Kent, reading to beguile the time, became immersed in his story. He was suddenly roused by Mrs. Aveling's hasty entrance.

"Where's Ned?" she asked sharply.

Kent had not noticed his silent disappearance. He looked up blankly, wondering what he should say to quiet Mrs. Aveling's alarm.

At that moment he saw Aveling steal past the window, with the silent ease he of late put into his motions. Kent leisurely rose and took up his hat. "Ned is just outside," he said pleasantly. "We are going for a walk."

Mrs. Aveling looked relieved. She was deathly pale to-day. Kent sauntered lazily out, only to fall into a quick run when the door concealed him. Once outside he cast a swift glance about. Aveling was nowhere in sight.

Kent came down the steps and halted in the

shelter of a clump of fir-trees. There was not a thing in the orderly paths, that stretched away in every direction, to indicate which one Aveling had taken. From the direction in which he was going when he passed the window, it was fair to assume that he had the cemetery again in mind. Kent left the trees and swung into the nearest path that led there.

There was no sign of Aveling near the grave when Kent reached it, nothing but a cluster of exquisite roses lying on it. He had not been able to see more than Aveling's head as he passed the window; but no other person could have put the roses there. He noticed that the flowers which Mariola and her father brought lay near the head of the grave, while the costly roses lay at the foot.

Kent's anxiety as to Aveling's whereabouts became more pressing. He glanced ahead. A broad walk stretched onward to a thick glade of trees descending a gentle slope. There was a glimmer of water through the foliage. A single footprint in a loose spot of earth looked fresh, as if some one had recently passed that way. Kent started down the path.

A half-smothered cry of rage cut through the stillness. Kent turned quickly about. Mariola's father was stooping over the grave. A moment later he had risen with the roses in his hand. With a backward swing of his lithe form, as sinuous as

a serpent, he hurled Aveling's gift into a nearby thicket. Kent proceeded down the path.

The growth of trees thickened. It was pervaded by a woody smell, which rose from the rank underbrush and spots of earth which here and there lay bare. The path apparently ran near a stream. Kent could hear the running water and now and then catch the sparkle of its surface. He came out abruptly upon a high, shelving bank. Upon its brink, looking quietly down at the swirling water, which here looked black and deep, stood Aveling. His hands were clasped behind his back, his head bent down. His black-clad form, projected clear against the light, looked more lean and spare than ever. He seemed lost in reverie.

"Well,—I have had a chase for you," said Kent. "I saw you pass the window and started out to join you for a walk. I brought up here in sheer desperation."

Aveling stood quite still. He had not stirred, except to turn a fixed and penetrating gaze on Kent, and then he again faced the water. "It seems quiet and restful here," he said.

Kent did not speak.

Aveling drew a long sigh. "I have a fancy when I come here," he said dreamily. "It looks so smooth, like a soft bed, where one might find a sleep that should truly rest."

Some magnetic influence from the music of the water, or perhaps its onward, gliding motion, swayed his always sensitive volition. Kent's sturdy, masculine sense closed about his mood.

"Is the fishing good?" he asked.

Aveling stirred. "Fishing?" he said vaguely. "I'm sure—— Fishing, did you say? Oh! I never fish here. No, we never fish here." He turned away from the stream and groped helplessly about.

"Let's go home, Kent," he said wearily. "I'm tired;" and he led the way without further parley.

The path ran beside the grave, where Aveling came to a sudden halt, looking anxiously over it.

"Why—why—they're gone!" he said, going nearer and looking up and down.

"What's the matter, Aveling?" Kent called out.

"It's the funniest thing. I put some roses there awhile ago and they are gone." He looked up at Kent, his eyes were bright and startled.

"Perhaps some one stole them," suggested Kent.

Aveling looked relieved. "Do you think so?" he said anxiously. "I thought the poor beggar wouldn't even let me put flowers on her grave. I like to——" He began to speak confusedly. Kent could get no meaning out of the disjointed

phrases. He laid his hand heavily on Aveling's arm.

"*Why* do you put flowers on that grave?" he asked imperiously.

"Because, Kent, don't you see I must,—I *must*." The last word became a helpless wail. Kent kept a piercing gaze upon the face that wavered before him. He saw, as through a veil, the struggling of a purpose which Aveling could feel but never master.

Aveling looked down at the place where the roses had lain, sighing heavily. "Well, they are gone." He moved away, and Kent followed. With a quick glance Kent put in one more stroke:

"Does Mariola look like her mother?"

"I don't know. I never saw the woman." He hesitated, adding in a lower tone, "She died two months before the late owner of Roxmoor."

Nearly three months before Aveling knew he was to succeed, and yet he put flowers upon this unknown woman's grave! Kent stepped forward to bar Aveling's pathway. If he could force a little coherent thought, it might help to disentangle the motive which lay concealed in Aveling's queer attentions. He fixed a keen, compelling gaze upon the wavering face:

"Think, man, think! Why did you put those flowers there? and why did Mariola's present give you pain? Think,—for your very life!"

Aveling began to speak slow, halting words, as if something buried in the inscrutable deeps of being was coming painfully into the circle of his conscious powers.

“I must not take from them,” he gasped. “I must give—give!”

CHAPTER XXII

THE DOOM OF ROXMOOR

KENT retired early that night, feeling worn and spent, but in a hopeful mood, in spite of the gloomy and anxious evening. Aveling, upon their return to the house, sank into a state of semi-oblivion, muttering the pressure of thought lying on him, "Give—give!" He remained quite tractable, and was easily persuaded to retire, and Kent followed at once.

Kent started suddenly from profound slumber into the acutest consciousness. He could not tell the hour, but knew it must be midway of the night. The sleep-bound house was locked in a silence that was almost audible. It seemed to him as if he had been wakened by a sharp rapping at the door. The sounds of moans and groans still rang in his ear. As he listened, the rapping and moans commenced again. The giant fir-tree outside his window was tapping on the glass. The branches sighed as they swayed against each other and the walls of the house.

He tried to go asleep again, but his consciousness seemed like a tight-strung harp. It quivered

at every gust of wind and snapping branch. He got up at last and made a light, looking down into the flame as if uncertain what next to do. A travelling-rug lay over his easy-chair. He put it about him, and, taking up a magazine that lay on the table, began to examine its pages. He had a disagreeable sense of waiting for something. Now and then he raised his head and listened. The silence of the house remained unbroken.

After an interval there came a sound, as if the garment of a passing form had brushed against the door. He rose quickly and threw it open. The hall was still and empty. A dim light cast fantastic shadows. He stepped out and peered around. Nothing stirred. After a moment's scrutiny he returned to his room, but he did not sit down. Instead, he went to his dressing-room, and presently emerged fully dressed.

He sat down in the easy-chair. His face was tense and drawn. There had something come to him, born of the hour and place, which confirmed Bateson's words and Dr. Warren's solemn warning. Was he to pay the price of interference, here,—alone, at midnight?

He heard again the brushing of that mysterious garment against the door. His eyes turned irresistibly toward it. He clutched the arms of his chair and began to argue with himself. He had been in the hall, and it was deserted; it was use-

less to go again. And yet, like invisible fingers, that compulsion tore at him. A dreadful fear stole through him as he battled,—a terrifying sense of loss, as if the Self were sinking into abysmal deeps. He rose unsteadily, and wavering steps led him to the door. He caught up a candle, by the power of the last faint impulse of his dying self-control, and passed into the hall. A shadow seemed to move before him.

Kent lost all volition as he blindly followed that ghostly leading. A few lights burned dimly everywhere. All about him he felt the pressure of a guiding that let him move but in one way. In this manner he traversed several corridors, turning and doubling with no sense of where he was going, until he entered a hall which he recognized as being a part of the Italian Wing. He slowed his steps and came to a halt, as he felt a lowering of the impulse which had led him. Through the dim light, he just perceived a doorway that opened in one of the darkened walls, and seemed to invite him, as he approached. He stepped within, and found himself in the picture-gallery!

He looked about the room, bewildered. Half-way down its gloomy length, a dull cloud of red light glowed like a dim mist. He could just faintly discern the frames of pictures that crowded the wall. He pressed silently forward. As he

neared the cloud of dull light, a single ray shone brightly from its centre, like a tiny star. Curious to know what it was, he advanced within the circle of light. A sudden sense of a human presence came upon him. He looked helplessly at the tiny lamp, such as the devout place before a shrine. It burned within a niche let into the wall beneath a picture,—its hiding-place so small, its flame so feeble that, in the daylight, only the sharpest eye might see it. Kent raised his candle, and scanned the picture that hung above the niche. The Templar eyed him in his melancholy splendor.

Unconsciously, Kent stepped backward. The candle-flame threw a lurid light across the canvas. Everything around the figure vanished. The stately form took on the look of solid clay. Kent, still trembling under the vivid sense of that elusive human presence which led him here, dumbly asked for the torturing secret of it. The anguished face glared into his. The racked soul showed its wound, but the secret, so clearly burdening him, kept within the shadows.

Kent felt a lessening of the strain upon him. The inscrutable presence slowly receded. With a feeling of desperation, Kent darted forward. He was so near—he could not lose the chance that might clear Aveling's burdened life.

“What is your guilty secret, you hound of hell?”

He stood glaring madly at the dreadful face. A moment later, he staggered back. A deadly clutch, like a pair of iron hands, gripped his throat. As he writhed within that horrible grasp, he stepped outside the circle of light,—and the hands were gone.

Pale and shaken, he stood gasping for breath, the sweat running from every pore. The light still burned. The picture hung in its melancholy silence. Unable to take in the meaning of it, Kent went forward, and set his foot within that magic circle. A weird consciousness of a double self fell upon him. Long fingers reached out toward him, the figure within the frame seemed to bend forward. Kent withdrew, and silence and oblivion fell again. But he felt a kind of moral lassitude, as if he could not resist outer persuasion, and insensibly approached the circle of light. Just on the edge, a swift intuition came to him, and laying a rude grip upon his diminished self-command, he turned and stumbled out of the gallery, putting his hand upon the door to pull it shut. It resisted his efforts. He put both hands upon it, and exerting all his strength, drew it shut with a crash, just in time to see Aveling coming down the corridor. Kent stepped back, with a feeling of gratitude that he had prevented Aveling's entrance to the gallery when such terrible powers were abroad.

Aveling seemed to be asleep. He walked straight

to the gallery door, and when he found it closed, seemed bewildered, fumbling aimlessly at the heavy wooden panels. Gradually, the power of motion left him. He dropped upon the floor, and sank into profound slumber. Mrs. Aveling hurried forward, and fell on her knees beside him, caressing his face, and calling his name.

“What is wrong?” asked Kent, dismayed by her wild grief.

“I don’t know,” she wailed, bent weeping over the prostrate figure. “Perhaps you have killed him!”

CHAPTER XXIII

CHALLENGED

WHEN the vertical rays of noon wiped out the shadows the next day, Aveling was still asleep. He lay in exactly the same position where they placed him, his face wore a purple flush. He breathed in deep, steady pulls. Dr. Warren was on duty, having been summoned in the night. In another room, Lady Melton and Mary Endicott worked over prostrate Mrs. Aveling. She had collapsed and did not move, except on occasion to wearily whisper, "Ned,—my Ned!"

Betty wept alone in another room, her child's soul shrinking at the awful alarms printed on every face, her loyal heart binding her to the place where her friend sorrowed. "Do you think he will die?" she asked Lady Melton.

"Oh, Betty dear, he had better go now, before he kills her too."

"But why, *why* must he die?" whispered Betty.

"I don't know, but they all do. It's only sooner or later," she said wearily. "Here comes Mr. Kent. Well?"

"He is just the same. How is Mrs. Aveling?"

"She will be no better until we take her some good news."

Kent's face saddened as she spoke. "Lady Melton, can you not persuade her to leave him for a while? It will otherwise surely kill her."

She gently shook her head. "Perhaps we can a little later, when we can convince her it is for his good. For the present it would be like tearing her heart from her living body. He will soon become violent and maniacal. It may then be possible."

Kent felt stifled. He was relieved of duty in the sick-room for the present, and he went out to the terrace for a little fresh air. Mrs. Aveling's words were weighing heavily upon him. If he had only left that infernal door to the gallery open! He did not yet know fully what his act meant; for, in the anxious hours that followed, there had been little time to dwell upon it. He knew it was, so far as any mortal knows, the closed door which produced the shock, followed by the alarming coma. But what chiefly occupied his thoughts was Aveling's venture into that deadly place. Why should he have risen at midnight to make that mysterious visit to the gallery? The final outcome of it all must rest somewhat on that.

As Kent emerged from the house, he saw Dr. Warren standing with his hands behind his back,

looking out across the valley. He bowed gravely to Kent.

"Fall seems to be coming early," he said with formal courtesy.

"Yes—the first of November will soon be here," said Kent sharply. The doctor maintained his grave manner.

"The natural season of death," he said, with a distant air.

"But suppose a man should not want to die *before his time*," Kent returned meaningly.

"Nature has a way of not attending to the wishes of her victims," said Dr. Warren, in a tone of great reserve.

"The wise man, then, lives merrily,—and dies when he must," said Kent.

"The wise man does not evade the laws of life, as they present themselves to mortal view."

A servant summoned Dr. Warren at this moment, and Kent was left to pace the terrace alone.

"So—he thinks Aveling to be in the grip of natural powers which idiots shouldn't meddle with. Now, why couldn't he say that in plain language? Confound these English, anyway! They make a man talk like a cuneiform inscription."

Since the day when Kent first talked to him, the old doctor had shown some shyness of the subject.

Kent's imaginative handling of Aveling's case he could not follow, and, apparently, after the first involuntary burst of wonder, did not try. It was plain, now, that he had not been carried beyond his own staid governance. Kent took his dry speeches to mean that he had seen little to confirm wild theories, and that he wished to emphasize his friendly warning.

Kent paced solitary up and down the brick-paved terrace, turning into the house at last, to go to his room. Dr. Warren, with a disturbed and anxious face, met him at the door. "I was just coming for you. Mr. Aveling's condition is rapidly changing. I may have need of you."

He motioned Kent to follow him to the sick man's room.

"Is his condition growing worse?" enquired Kent.

"Alas, I cannot tell;" the doctor's anxiety was mingled with an uncertainty about his hold upon the case that arrested Kent's attention.

"There are elements in it that escape the usual medical diagnosis?" pursued Kent.

Dr. Warren gave a brief assent.

Kent thought a moment. His next question evoked the doctor's most professional manner. "What would Mr. Aveling's chances be if this were an ordinary case, without—complications?"

"I should say he would be a dead man within twenty-four hours."

They walked the rest of the way in silence. Outside the hallway that led to Aveling's room Dr. Warren paused. "This is a case requiring more than medical skill. You possess an influence over the unhappy patient which may save his life when the crisis comes. Prepare your mind and nerves for a severe strain."

"There will be a crisis, then?"

"There always has been." After a moment, during which Kent remained silent, the doctor led the way into the room where Aveling lay.

Dr. Warren advanced to the bedside. Aveling was still asleep, but the purple flush was gone. He breathed easily and regularly, a slight moisture was visible on his forehead. The doctor laid a finger on his pulse. A moment later he motioned Kent to follow him out of the room. His face wore a look of utter astonishment. Kent waited for him to speak.

"Ten minutes ago I left him on the verge of the usual crisis. It comes in the form of demoniacal possession, and here he sleeps like an infant,—like an infant," he repeated the words in utter perplexity. "One can make nothing of it."

"The danger is past?" asked Kent.

"Apparently he has skipped one stage of these attacks. He will sleep a while, and then wake,

sane and quiet." He bent his head in thought, looking strangely disturbed. "Go and have some luncheon, and then return. I want yours to be the first face he sees when he wakens."

Kent was struck by Dr. Warren's expression. A sense of shifting values showed plainly in the old, weather-beaten face.

"Why do you want him to see me first?" Kent asked.

There was just a perceptible pause. "Mr. Kent, I begin to hope that Mr. Aveling may yet be spared. But for you he would, undoubtedly, be dead."

"Except for me! I thought I caused the attack."

"Perhaps you did. But you saved him from something worse."

"How could it have been worse?" Kent asked in surprise.

Dr. Warren bent the keenest scrutiny upon him.

"Do you know the cause of Mr. Aveling's midnight visit to the gallery?"

"No."

"Then realize the wonder of it. If he had entered that fatal gallery his problems would be over, for he was going to his death, after the manner of his race. And, as I live, I believe that you held back the approach of Roxmoor's doom!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MESSAGE

THREE days later Kent called upon Dr. Warren. The doctor closely scanned the young man's face, which bore signs of the heavy strain that was being made upon him.

"I know what you want," Dr. Warren said abruptly. "To have me tell you that you don't need a vacation."

Kent nodded.

"Well, you do," he said roughly. "Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"That's what I want you to tell me. Why, I fall into a very devil of a temper if any one is so impertinent as to rattle a newspaper."

"Go out under the sky for a day," said Dr. Warren, locking his great hands together.

"But is it safe to leave Aveling? That's what I really came to ask."

Dr. Warren moved a paper-weight upon his desk.

"No one of us is omniscient, but I believe Mr. Aveling will need your services more, after a while, than he does now. I repeat, go out under the sky

for a day. Don't strain your nerves too far, they are too valuable; and don't, for your life, take midnight strolls—in Roxmoor."

"I didn't go very willingly on the first one," Kent ruefully returned. "But, perhaps, it was just as well. If it hadn't been for me he would have gone into that horrible gallery. Why don't they wall up the thing?"

"Fate cannot be outwitted, Mr. Kent. What must be, must be. Besides, I might remark that experiments along that line have not encouraged their repetition."

Kent looked curiously at the solemn, impassive countenance, dimly hinting the surge of an implacable fate. "Well," he slowly began, "I suppose I am not made that way. I'd like to try a tussle with the powers that govern these grim episodes."

"Did you feel so much confidence the other night with the grip upon your throat?"

Kent glanced up, startled. "Is that the way they die?"

"Yes, we found the late Mr. Aveling with prints of fingers upon his throat,—strangled to death."

Kent rose hastily from his seat. "Then, I must go at once back to Roxmoor."

Dr. Warren put a finger upon his wrist. "Take my advice, I have lived among these horrors for a lifetime. Spend the day in the open, it is a

perilous necessity. You are sound and vigorous, but your pulse is under fifty. Do not return to Roxmoor until sunset, and your pulse will be running at normal speed."

Kent paused irresolute.

"I know what I am talking of," said the old man kindly. "The vampire of Roxmoor is draining you, too, or you would not have been led into the gallery the other night. But we'll sell you dear, my boy, we'll sell you dear,"—he laid a friendly hand upon the young man's shoulder. Kent met his gaze squarely. "Will Ned be safe? Mrs. Aveling has not yet recovered."

"But Watson is on guard. Whatever escapes his cat-like watch no one will see. Besides, Mr. Aveling is probably safe from attack; for the impulse to seek that ordeal will not return so soon, unless he invites it, which is quite unlikely."

Kent was persuaded, and spent the rest of the day rambling through the country-side, returning late in the afternoon, refreshed and strengthened. When he came in sight of Roxmoor Dr. Warren's words flashed through his mind, and he laid a finger on his pulse. It bounded through his veins, a full, vigorous flood. He went on a little more thoughtful and concerned.

The sun was low in the sky when he came up the lime-bordered avenue. The long, level rays struck full against the clump of copper beeches to which

Aveling had called his attention the day he came to Roxmoor. Its artful setting interested him. In idleness he drew nearer to it. A thick growth of pine-trees stood behind it. His eye was caught by evidences of a concealed path, or at least overgrown. He pushed aside the underbrush and stepped in. A pathway, choked with weeds and brambles, wound into an otherwise impenetrable thicket. Kent picked his way through, growing more curious every minute, and finally emerged in a spot so desolate that it seemed impossible the place could belong to well-kept Roxmoor.

It was an open court, surrounded on three sides by a thick grove of pine-trees. The fourth side was formed by a flat wall of the castle. In its prime it must have been a place of gayety and laughter. Now the arbors tumbled in decay; vines, nourished by the damp air of England, overran everything with a mass of tangled drapery. The rank growth of unpruned trees choked up the entrances. Broken arches, and stained columns were smothered in moss. Even the wind sighed in mournful cadences, a requiem to a vanished beauty. In the centre stood a fountain, once a thing of loveliness. Now only a thin stream of water trickled through the stagnant pool in the broken basin. A figure, poised lightly in the centre, had lost both arms. The meaning of the action, disappearing with the mutilation, lent the whole foun-

tain an air of ineffectual effort, together with the suggestion of a noble impulse, thwarted by some crippling circumstance.

Kent advanced further into the court, wondering at the strange motive which had decreed that spot so fair should be given over to ruin and decay. He wondered, too, at the artful intention which concealed the entrance. In their explorations, Aveling had referred to it as a grove of pine-trees, and there was nothing to belie his words. Kent looked up at the gray wall fronting him, unbroken, except for a series of closed shutters, and a window which projected slightly and ran to the roof. Every barred window increased still further the mystery that hung over it. It bore an acute resemblance to a closed, stricken face.

As his eye travelled over the mute façade, it was detained by a dark blot in the lower part of the projecting window. The casement stood ajar. Was any one in the room behind it? What errand could bring anything human to this old and ruinous portion of the castle?

Kent crossed the thick, weedy grass. A gray pine-tree stood near the open window. A scarlet vine crept among the branches like the drip of blood. Advancing to the window Kent put his elbows upon the ledge and looked in. A long, lofty chamber stretched away from the window

where he stood. At one end was a cavernous fireplace, such as Mid-England required for family comfort and hospitality. It might have been such a banqueting-hall as, in a ruder age, rang with the troubadour's song and the boisterous gayety of the wassail bowl.

But there was evidence that, in a later time, a sober, saddened heart had swept out the song and laughter and filled the place with another spirit, groping painfully with the elements of a darker experience. A row of book-shelves, running up to the black-beamed roof, extended entirely around the room. They were closed up with solid doors. A few clumsy pieces of furniture, worm-eaten and darkened with time, stood about; while, glimmering through the shadows, Kent discerned the rusty implements which betokened a constant practice of unholy arts.

It was a gruesome place to contemplate, but it stirred deeper emotions in Kent. In the whole dank atmosphere and suggestion of unhallowed trespass upon infernal regions, there came to him a strong analogy to the haunted tower and its solitary chamber. For, in the shadows that glided spectrally through the deserted room, he saw Aveling, standing before an open case, clutching with eager haste one book after another, feverishly exploring its leaves as if for papers, and then pushing it impatiently back to its place. Sometimes

he ran his arm back of a row of dusty volumes, always to move on again, with mounting interest.

Kent put his hands upon the ledge and lightly vaulted through the window. Aveling turned a white, staring face, in which struggled up the fire and fury of a demon, and with the leap of a maddened wild beast sprang upon Kent.

With cracking limbs, Kent held back the furious attacks, falling in blind rage, without method or meaning, except for the passion which had transformed the man into a demon. Kent's cool brain gave him the advantage that he needed, and from time to time his quick hands laid a numbing clutch upon Aveling's exhausting efforts. Gradually, he felt the lessening vigor that stole through the writhing frame. He began to push him backward, until Aveling rested against the closed bookshelves. Kent put an iron hand upon each fast-weakening arm, and pinioned him, helpless and glaring.

A pallor stole over Aveling's face, he began to tremble.

"Well, old fellow, I can wrestle a bit yet," said Kent, hoping to rescue a hopeless situation. But his cheery words fell dead and lifeless.

"Let me go!" said Aveling hoarsely.

Kent dropped his arms. The strength of the Invader vanished, and only the weakened frame, whose drooping Kent had daily watched, remained.

Aveling sank into a chair. He laid his arms upon a table, and putting his head upon them, gave himself over like a man in extremity.

Kent stood motionless until the shaking figure at the table grew a little quieter. Then he laid his hand on Aveling's shoulder. "Come, Ned. Let me take you to your room," he said quietly.

Aveling raised a distorted face. "Kent—will you ever forgive me!"

"Nonsense, boy. Why, it was just a friendly tussle."

The horror in Aveling's eyes chilled him. "No, Kent—I meant to murder you."

Kent stepped back involuntarily as Aveling clawed at the thick edges of the table, swaying as if hypnotized. "I don't know what I am—whether man or beast—or a horrible mixture——"

"Come, Ned—don't let's talk about that now. I am going to take you to your room. You need rest."

But Aveling did not heed. He seemed to defend himself. "Listen, Kent. I dared to venture out alone to-day. I let him take me,—soul and body,—and I don't know, clearly, what happened, until you came. I only remember suffering the pangs of death, and then I came to life again, in the fever of a terrible passion. But the awful part of it was that I did not lose *myself*. I was two men in one; my soul had been invaded by a spirit

abhorrent to me. And when I saw your face I did not know you; you seemed to be that other person I loathed and tried to strangle, and I sprang upon you to kill. Don't you see, Kent? Don't you see?" he questioned feverishly.

"See what, Ned?"

"I must *go on*;" his wild eyes tried to meet Kent's, but they wavered as if his volitional powers had been broken.

"Why?" urged Kent. He felt the blood pound in his ears. Maybe he could wrench Aveling's secret loose, and learn why the uneasy dead came back.

"I must go on," he said in a thick voice. "If I go into the jaws of the infernal—I must know what it is he wants of me."

"Does he want you to tell him something?" Kent whispered, fearful to break the spell.

"No—no. To do—to do! He wants me to do something, and I can't find out what it is!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE SURRENDER

AVELING and Kent were lounging in the Red Parlor. At a nearby table Mr. Bateson sat looking over a mass of papers. He had come down from London the night before. Instead of working in the room devoted to business, Aveling, for some inscrutable reason, had invaded the Red Parlor, where Kent was apt to sit alone during these interviews.

The morning wore on monotonously. Mr. Bateson scratched busily, copying what he extracted from the papers, which Kent noticed were old and worn, into a small red note-book. The quiet of the room, and the rhythmic noise of the moving pen produced a curious sensitiveness of attention in Kent. He was conscious of every stroke of Bateson's pen, and he noticed that every time he moved Aveling started in his chair.

He threw down the book he was reading, and rising from his chair, sauntered to a window. He yawned and stretched out his arms, striking Aveling, who had followed him, full in the face. "Good

gracious, Ned!" he exclaimed. "I'll be hauled up for assault and battery if I go on like this."

Aveling smiled faintly. "I thought you might be going out and I wanted to go along," he said wistfully.

"Do you want to go for a walk?"

"Oh, I don't care," he replied indifferently. "I just thought you were going."

Kent regarded the landscape in silence. As he turned away from the window his attention was arrested by the peculiar actions of phlegmatic Mr. Bateson, whose face blazed with animation. He nodded significantly in Aveling's direction, and made some incomprehensible gestures, all of which greatly mystified Kent. He was still more puzzled when, a little later, Aveling moved toward the door, and motioned him to follow. Kent obeyed, feeling like a puppet in a dumbshow.

Aveling struck into a quicker gait in the corridor, with an apprehensive manner, and a nervous, occasional glance at him, from which Kent gathered that he was expected to play a part, the nature of which was yet entirely dark to him. He preserved a steady and imperturbable composure, watching his companion at intervals.

Aveling seemed to grow more nervous. His roving glance sought Kent's more frequently and left it with a sense of irritation. They were nearing the entrance to the picture gallery. At a

little distance Aveling paused and looked at it with sombre regard, and then turned abruptly away.

"There are certain data which Bateson needs. He is preparing a short history of Roxmoor. Come with me into the Italian Wing, I want to verify some of his work."

Kent obediently followed, comparing notes in his driest manner. He noticed that Aveling stopped with elaborate care at every familiar place—the ancient tapestry, a marble image of some illustrious saint, and the shrine-like niche where the dim portrait hung in the darkened chamber. He mentally asked a rueful pardon, for Aveling seemed to evoke his sympathy and aid. After some time was spent in this fruitless manner, Kent felt constrained to answer, in some way, Aveling's vain attempts at co-operation. "I'm afraid, Ned, that my wits are cruelly dependent upon that crude contrivance we call a language," he ventured.

He was baffled by a light laugh from Aveling, who remarked that the lunch hour was near. Conversation turned, by some weird caprice, upon English politics, which, just then, were full of lively interest, and luncheon, at which they were joined by Dr. Warren, was a very cheerful experience.

After the meal was over, Kent strolled into the Red Parlor with Mrs. Aveling, where he was to

wait for the others, consulting together on business in another room. When that was finished they were to proceed together to the picture gallery. Aveling said he wanted Kent's advice about the lighting, which needed improvement.

Kent was struck afresh by Mrs. Aveling's frail appearance. The carefully laid rouge did not deceive him; nor her forced appetite and spirits at the table. She bent over a bit of sewing now, but her manner betrayed suppressed excitement, and she often glanced up as if expecting something.

At the sound of Aveling's voice calling loudly for Kent, she rose hastily to her feet, and as Kent passed her on his way from the room, she caught his arm.

"He has given up to you," she whispered. "Can you save him?"

She was looking at him with dumb asking, as if that loved life lay in his gift. He understood now Bateson's mysterious gestures, and Dr. Warren's veiled hints at luncheon. All three—doctor, lawyer, and wife—expected him to see Aveling through some ordeal, and Aveling, no doubt, meant him to use the hint gained yesterday. The old lord wanted him "to do" some stated thing, and Aveling's present venture, whatever it was, pointed to that end. A dreadful sense of his own impotence sickened him. He saw despair dull Mrs. Aveling's face as she watched his.

“Have faith, dear Mrs. Aveling. We will do our very best,” he said bravely.

“Is that all you can say?” The grief in her words told that some inward stay sank.

“It is all I dare say,” he replied, the truth wrung from him by the sheer impossibility of facing her with a lie. He bowed as her hand slowly dropped from his arm, and with lowered eyes passed through the door.

Aveling, with a light flow of talk, led the way to the gallery. He threw open the door, discussing the various theories of light, and the possible use of prisms to divert the rays into dark corners, circling about the vast chamber until he stood before the portrait of the Templar. A rapid and startling change came over him, as if he had masked for a while, and now brushed away a hindrance. His hesitation had been swallowed up, and in its place a stern and man-like resolution invited Kent to join a warfare. He now began to speak, with an intense, dramatic fire.

“There be deeps within the human soul, where, perchance, may lie treasures. But only one can go below to search,—and the other”—he paused with an impassioned gesture—“the friend will wait, and, maybe—save.”

With a swift movement, he stepped within the circle of light, which the daytime made invisible. His whole frame was shaken in convulsions,—

and the Templar, in all his melancholy stateliness, stepped forth.

Kent staggered back, for Dr. Warren had said this was the ordeal which no Aveling survived. Their greatest care had been to prevent such a stimulation of memory as might produce it; and now he had, apparently, connived with Aveling in this dangerous experiment. Kent turned about, white to the lips. "My God, Warren! How dared you let him go?"

The doctor stopped him with a hasty gesture.

"Take courage, friend. The day of miracles has returned."

"Miracles?"

"Yes, for no Aveling has ever had the fortitude to *seek* that awful change. It has only occurred by the driving of some irresistible force. But some mysterious element you put into him nerved him to the trial, and after the last test of your power, I could not refuse consent."

Kent watched, with fascinated eyes, the strange figure moving slowly away to pause before the portrait that hung beside the Templar. "What does he hope from such a mad experiment?" he asked, in a husky whisper.

"That he may find it possible, if your reasoning is correct, to venture into the dread land of another personality, and be sure of safe return. If his purpose should succeed, and you can recall

him, he may yet wring his salvation from the powers which control the human destiny."

He paused, for Aveling had started up with a stifled cry. He ran his hand across his head, and then, with terrible haste, sped through the vast apartment, toward the entrance. Warren, in trembling excitement, seized Kent.

"Go, man, and quickly. His life is in deadly peril!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ANSWER

KENT followed Aveling, watching closely. But, beyond the fact that he was on some kind of search, Aveling's actions were without significance. There was apparent neither method nor order in his movements, rambling aimlessly through the endless corridors, with a disagreeable resemblance to a lost soul seeking Paradise. He wandered into the apartments which his ancestral double had occupied in life; and the vast hall, where the old lord had pored eagerly over black-letter books, or worked strange spells with the rude chemistry of the age; even straying to the deserted court, which had been his solace in its day of beauty.

By careful observation, Kent discovered that, after each baffled hunt, there came a period of confusion, and that Aveling always returned to the picture, as if to secure, in his groping senses, the new starting-point his failure asked. Beyond this, there was nothing gained. He went mechanically over the weary round, until signs of exhaustion began to appear in his increasing pallor and flagging step. But he kept steadily on, with

machine-like precision, testing panels, and searching closets as if for hidden recesses.

After some time had passed, he came to a sudden halt before the portrait in the gallery, an eerie repetition of the vanished man, knocking so insistently upon the thin walls which lie between the living and the dead. But he did not find the trail again, and began to tremble, making flurried, helpless motions, showing plainly slackening signs of the Invader's power. Dr. Warren stepped forward and touched his arm, but he did not notice. Warren, with solemn emotion, beckoned to Kent.

"Now is the time. See if you can recall him."

A thrill of fear shot through Kent. Suppose that he should fail! Suppose the inscrutable laws which guard a spiritual world from rash invasion should foil his purpose to enter the hell of Aveling's lost consciousness, and burst its sepulchre. For one horrible moment he suffered the pangs of failure. Then, thrusting the possibility out of his mind and marshalling his energies for the accomplishment of his purpose, he stepped forward, and grasping both Aveling's shoulders, spoke quietly in his ear, an old boyhood call, "I say, Ned, I'm here. It's Kent."

A slight shiver passed through Aveling. His bright, friendly eyes uncovered, and the old answer left his lips. "All right, Kent. I'm here, too."

With this triumph in his mind, Aveling fell to his task with renewed vigor. The fatal time was surely drawing nearer. Kent, with a new grasp upon the behavior expected of him, kept close by Aveling's side, who now passed almost completely under the power he no longer tried to keep at bay. His frequent transformations told heavily on his strength. Kent watched with redoubled vigilance, but the swiftly passing days brought them no nearer to the hoped-for end. Aveling's nights began to be troubled. He rose as if in a trance, and continued his weary search, until Kent's faith in his own reasonings began to flag. He could make no use of the willing tool that lay in his hands. Where did the fault lie? In the relaxation of mind and courage, the general belief in the doom of Roxmoor gained horrible power to weigh him down, for Aveling's fearful night-walks were full of danger to them both.

Late one afternoon, fagged and weary, he sat alone in the Red Parlor, running the matter over. In a week the fatal birthday would be on them, and he hoped for nothing now, from the daily round of the desolate rooms, which he made in Aveling's wake. He strove to think of some other way to handle circumstances, or some other place to seize the mystery. He again went carefully over Aveling's movements, when, like an offering of fate, there returned the memory of the mys-

terious grave beneath the willows. He started up. Aveling was somewhere in Watson's care. He might go to the grave alone.

Spurred by a faint hope, he hurried out through the hall, when he saw Mrs. Aveling descend the great stairs. A ray of light struck full in her face, and in its radiance, Kent saw a terrible transformation. A sudden misgiving seized him. Perhaps he had done wrong to rouse her to fresh hope, for he realized, in the cruel light, that she was little able to meet the keen grief of a second disappointment. It was not so much that she was pale and thin that caused Kent's consternation. But a dreadful blight seemed to have settled about her youth and bloom. She came on down the stairs until she stood before him. With her hollow, gray eyes, she directed his attention to the wall, where a calendar hung. A slender pencil of light fell through the casement, and brought the date into clear relief, white figures on a black ground—October twenty-six. Only five days remained.

Mrs. Aveling devoured Kent's face, and a great hunger overspread her own, as if she asked him to be more than human. With a motion of despair, he bent his pained eyes upon her. "Heaven knows I'll guard him like my own soul," he said in a deep, shaken voice. "But, pray to all your gods to send me some assurance that I am of any use to him!"

and without another word, he passed swiftly through the door, and away from the house.

He hurried to the cemetery, still hoping for some result from his fruitless visits. It had fallen on him like a spell that the gods must send him a sign, or his courage would fail. A fleece of clouds gathered in the west did not promise success for his venture, and just as he set foot inside the gate, they passively quenched the burning disk.

“Do the very stars in their courses war against us?” he thought in impatient anger as he passed along the path to where the grave lay.

He looked intently at the slab of marble which had raised emotions so profound in Aveling. Carefully he scanned the weather-worn surface. Slowly the clouds in the west lifted, and the sun streamed out. Kent gave a sudden start and bent over the stone, eagerly examining it. Then he withdrew a pace or two, and a look of wonder, even horror crossed his face. The long, horizontal rays of late afternoon struck across the grain of the stone, revealing every changing tint and contour and undulation. With deep wonder he saw, starting from the depths of the granite, as if drawn by a human hand, the face of a woman gazing straight at him.

As he continued to look he felt something steal over him, the consciousness of being watched. He raised his eyes to search for that spell, and

saw, directly in front of him, framed about by a thick tangle of leaves, the same eyes, the eyes of the tombstone. They were the same, but living, and in a human face, which was screened by the protecting leaves. They looked straight at him, but they were friendly eyes, and not unknown as he quietly realized. He glanced back at the stone, and started. The eyes there seemed to borrow life and color from the living ones above. The eyes among the leaves were the questioning ones of a child; these were the same, but burning with the knowledge of the human pilgrimage, as if life still held, for the soul that owned them, the emblems of an ageless sorrow. Again Kent's glance shifted to the living eyes. Only a second, they stayed to meet him, and silently, with a slight shaking of the leaves, were gone.

Kent lost all thought of time, until some one clutched his arm, and he knew Aveling was there. He involuntarily glanced at the tombstone. Aveling saw his meaning shift of look. "Did you see it?" he asked eagerly.

"I saw a woman's face," said Kent.

A great joy flamed into Aveling's face.

"Thank God!" he fervently exclaimed.

Kent made a gesture in the direction of the gravestone. "What does that face mean to you?" he asked in some surprise.

Aveling stepped back. "Come and see," he said simply.

They returned to the house, and Aveling led the way to the picture gallery, pausing before the portrait of a woman which hung beside the Templar. And there glowed, in a sudden revelation, the same deep eyes. Other scenes and memories shifted in Kent's brain,—the faded picture in the deserted bed-chamber,—the eyes on the tombstone,—the eyes in the leaves,—he groped a little further, and seemed to see, in the shadow of an overhanging fate, a child, standing by a road-way,—a wistful child with friendly eyes—— He started back, and shouted, "Little Mariola!"

He was stupefied by his own discovery. "What does it mean, Ned?" he said in bewilderment. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I. But I've always known, with that conviction which is better than knowledge, that Mariola had some vital part in the fatality at Roxmoor. And now that you have seen the face on her mother's gravestone, I feel fresh assurance that we'll break through the tangle."

"I still don't understand," said Kent. "Who is this woman whose picture hangs here, and what has she to do with Mariola and her mother?"

"This picture is a portrait of the Templar's wife, whose name is also Mariola. How her name,

and even her very features, came to be reproduced in this alien family, I know no more than you do.”

Kent's thoughts returned to the quiet grave and the level rays of sunset light which drew out the face more clearly. “Why has no one ever seen that face in the stone before?”

“I think, now, it must be that it is only to be seen by some favorable change of light, and I was always alone when it appeared. I have dragged every one here, but no one saw it. Then I banked on you, and you didn't fail me, Kent,—you never do!”

He wrung Kent's hand in both his own. Fresh energy was visibly flowing in him. He spoke in a tone of deep conviction. “Kent, you'll help me out of this bog yet. Never doubt that the good God sent you here!”

CHAPTER XXVII

STRIKING THE TRAIL

WHEN Kent and Aveling entered the hall they found Lady Melton with Mrs. Aveling.

"Don't you think I am a nice person?" smiled her ladyship. "I have come to dine with you. Betty and Lord Melton are coming, too."

Kent knew by the anxious gleam in her eyes that she had come to relieve her forebodings about them all, and he gave her a look that caused her troubled countenance to lift.

The company which presently gathered was quite subdued, except for Betty's lively chatter. When dinner was over they formed a group around the fireplace in the hall, where great logs sent a blaze roaring up the chimney. The night was sharp and chill outside. Kent withdrew a little from the heat of the fire. Aveling instantly stirred.

"Where are you going?" he inquired anxiously.

"I am going to get a more comfortable chair for Miss Betty," said Kent, with hasty invention.

"But I don't want a more comfortable chair,"

flashed Betty, from a low stool in the chimney-corner. "I am afraid you were not listening, Mr. Kent, or you would know that I was reciting Indian legends—my own family tradition, if you please—and I wouldn't want to be comfortable while telling these hair-raising tales of my ancestors."

Aveling's face blanched, his hands trembled, and he half rose from his chair. No one saw him but Kent. Aveling's movements were noiseless. Betty was looking into the fire, her hands clasped upon her knee. A half-smile played about her lips. Kent put his hand heavily upon Aveling's arm and, leaning forward, drew every one's attention to the girlish figure dreaming in the firelight.

"And besides——" The meaning glance finished his sentence as it rested in open admiration upon the picture in the chimney-corner. Betty turned and met his look. The flush upon her cheeks deepened as she again faced the fire.

"It gives the story more dramatic force," she said composedly. "My favorite great-grandmother had a fancy for the chimney-corner."

As she moved, the firelight brought into sharp light the setting of a miniature hanging at her neck.

"Is that her portrait?" inquired Kent.

Betty put her hand upon the miniature. "Yes, that is her likeness. It is one of Cosway's best." She unhooked it from the chain. Kent came forward to examine it.

"And did the Indians scalp and tomahawk her, too?"

"Oh, dear no!" laughed Betty. "She never left England. She was an Earl's daughter, and made a shocking *mésalliance*,—married a plebeian; an elopement by moonlight it was, with all the usual accompaniments, and from that branch of the family we came."

"The usual accompaniments," mused Kent. "I suppose you mean excommunication, and all that." He glanced at Aveling, who had sunk into a mood of indifference. He looked pale and waxen, as if the life currents had been silently withdrawn.

"Oh, yes, it was highly regular!" Betty went on. "She was roundly cursed by the Earl, her father; and, although she begged at his door one freezing winter night a few years later when her husband was dead, he virtuously refused to see her to his dying day."

"What a narrow escape!" said Kent. "You might have been an English nobleman."

"Yes, I often think of it. But the only thing that gives me any real concern is the portrait gallery. I could support with haughty scorn the

worst that life could do, if I had a gallery full of ancestral portraits at my back."

A thrill went through Aveling's frame, and life and animation, invisible as an electric current, flowed back to every feature as he spoke with quiet dignity to Betty. "I believe you have not seen the Roxmoor gallery," he said.

The girl started at the peculiar, vibrant voice, casting a glance of fear over the circle. Aveling pointedly addressed himself to her.

"Would you like to see it?" he asked, in full, resonant tones.

"No—that is, yes," she stammered.

Aveling at once ordered lights in the gallery. Betty withdrew her fascinated gaze and looked imploringly at Lady Melton, who came at once to her side. "Don't fret," she said soothingly, as she laid a hand on the girl's shoulder. "It is too late now. All may yet go well, dear."

In spite of her reassuring words, Betty read her fear. Lady Melton turned away and went to Mrs. Aveling, leaving the girl incapable of speech or motion, watching with mournful face Aveling's directions to the servants. He seemed to be perfectly master of himself. Then Betty heard Kent's voice in her ear. A vague comfort stole over her as she met his eyes. She quickly put her hand into the arm he held out to her.

"Do not fear," he said, in low, imploring tones.

"But suppose I have——" She shivered and her face was full of trouble as she again looked at Aveling.

"But suppose I can——" Kent smiled down at her.

The light of an answering spirit shone in her eyes as she lifted them to his. "You are a most provoking tease," she declared, with a pale smile. "But you are comforting."

They were the last to enter the gallery. It was the first time Kent had seen it with leisure to examine its characteristics. His former visits had been hurried and anxious ones and the light poor and insufficient. Now it was fully illuminated—a noble apartment of enormous size, floored with rich mosaic, and ornamented with pillars of whitest marble. Here, more than anywhere, was shown the flight of time. A motley collection of pictures of every degree of merit thickly covered the walls; the earliest Italian masters; some unknown men of genius, antedating even Italy's great period, down through the ebb and flow of Art's great moments to the best of contemporary effort. There were old, darkened portraits from the Middle Ages; some of them stood a noble testimony to the care of ancient painters; some of them had completely receded

in shadow, leaving only here and there an uncertain light or gleam of color where a prominent feature or a gay robe had been.

The sense of awe that pervades the halls of Art subdued the talk, and the company fell apart in little groups. Kent and Betty moved slowly along the wall, studying the canvases and exchanging comments. They halted before a row of portraits—four young men accompanied by four women. All of them bore evidences of recent work. The fresh paint glittered; the gold upon the heavy frames looked garish in its newness beside the mellow tints that predominated in the vast apartment. Kent stood so still and stared so fixedly at the pictures that Betty looked up. His face displayed the premonition that seemed to leap out of the spot of newness in the old.

“Who are they?” Betty quickly asked.

“I don’t know,” Kent returned, adding in a lower voice: “Come, quick—away from here. Aveling is coming this way.”

A moment later he was discoursing, with all possible nonchalance, upon the beauties of a Holbein portrait,—an old man with a pair of lean, bony hands crossed upon his lap; a thin, ascetic mouth, and that assurance of likeness which true portraiture always gives.

“Well, *Kent*—can’t you find anything better than that old ascetic for Betty to look at?” Avel-

ing came forward. "You come with me. I'll show you a row of Gainsborough and Romney beauties that will make you wonder what Kent does with his eyes."

Kent watched them go off, and then quickly searched the hall for Lady Melton. With a few rapid strides he was at her side.

"Will you take pity on me and escort me safely through the centuries?" he asked, adding whimsically, "It is my youngness again."

"Youngness? Why not youth?"

"Because there is hope for youth," he said dramatically. "Youth is of the future, while youngness can only wither and fall, but never ripen."

"I am consumed with sorrow for your pitiable state," said Lady Melton, with a musical laugh as she placed her hand upon his arm.

She kept up a light flow of talk, Kent drawing her insensibly toward the row of fresh portraits. She started when she saw them.

"For God's sake, don't stop here!" she said passionately.

"Who are they?" was Kent's low, imperious demand.

"The last four heirs," she panted.

"Ah, I see,—who all died at thirty-five." He felt her glance leap upon him. "Did they all live at Roxmoor for any length of time?"

"Three of them lived here for short periods of time. The last one lived here just three weeks." She still breathed a little fast. "It was horrible," she finished, shuddering.

Kent leaned toward her. "Lady Melton, why were you so frightened?"

She glanced hurriedly at Aveling. He was coming in their direction. Betty was evidently ill at ease, but she was talking bravely. Lady Melton began hastily to examine a picture.

"He does not know that they all died at thirty-five. We have used every device to keep him from knowing it."

Kent was running over the curious matter of the portraits. There seemed to be more in it than Lady Melton had disclosed.

"By whose order were the portraits painted?" was his next question.

Lady Melton's voice trembled.

"By the present master."

"When?"

"As soon as he came to Roxmoor."

Kent considered a moment.

"Did he seem to be especially anxious about it?"

She threw back her head and met his eyes squarely.

"It was the first sign of—of the usual change that comes to the unhappy master of Roxmoor."

She recoiled, for a most amazing change had come over Kent.

"The first sign—as if he were in haste about a duty; as if he were *impressed* to be hasty?" He stopped, with an enquiry in his voice.

"Yes," faltered Lady Melton.

"Tell me, of what did the late Mr. Aveling die?" he asked, with a sudden change of tone.

"He was found dead."

"But of what did he die?" he repeated, with dogged emphasis.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said composedly.

"And *they*—the autocratic and infallible they—what do they say?"

"Neither do they know,—nor any other creature."

Kent was struck by the lingering expression in the last word.

"Creature—no creature knows," he said meaningly. Lady Melton's cool, crisp tones cut in.

"There be things of the earth, earthy; and there be things of the spirit," and then with a quick change of voice, "The two make a very queer mixture, Mr. Kent."

He turned her about with a slight movement, and she found herself facing the Templar. She hastily stepped back.

"It seems like a live thing," she said.

Kent was watching the niche below, with its faint radiance.

"Lady Melton, why does that lamp burn there?"

"It was one of the provisions of the Templar's will that a lamp should always burn there." She hesitated. "It is said the Templar caused the niche to be made, and left his curse upon the house should any neglectful son forget his duty."

"And has the lamp always burned?"

"Alas! no."

"When did it go out?"

"That is not known."

"And when was it re-lit?"

"During the incumbency of the present master."

"At what time?"

"Just thirty-one days ago."

He faced her in open astonishment. "Since I came?"

"Since you came."

Kent's mind sped back. That must have been just before the revelation in the gallery. Then it must have been—— Like a vivid experience it all returned to him. He saw Aveling's swift passage through the corridor, and Bateson stealthily following with an unlighted taper, that day he watched from a corner of the deserted wing.

He stared in silence at the niched lamp, then up at the saturnine visage of the Templar. He shifted his position slightly and allowed his gaze to rest upon the canvas next to it.

"Lady Melton, did it ever occur to you that there should be some reason for the likeness of name and face between this ancient lady and our small friend, Mariola?"

She started, as if he had touched a subject of painful thought. "Could it have any connection with the trouble of my friend, Mme. Barotti?"

"Who is she?"

"Mariola's grandmother,—a lovely soul, who lives in an isolation as strange as Mr. Aveling's."

Kent flashed an eager look upon her. "Tell me what you mean?"

"Mr. Barotti, Mariola's father, is under the spell of a curious hate for the master of Roxmoor, whoever he may happen to be, and, in the recent rapid change of succession, has been wrought into a frenzy at times. Now I see some meaning in it. Mr. Aveling stands for this noble lady, and Barotti stands for Mariola, with this curious bar of hate between them."

"But Aveling does not hate," said Kent.

"What does he feel?" she eagerly asked. "I know he loves Mariola."

"He feels impelled to find something in the manor, and, combined with this, an unaccountable

wish to give to Mariola and her father. Now here we must use a little invention. The old lord wishes to give. Aveling feels an inclination to give to Mariola, but cannot make his impulse take any definite form. Now suppose the formulated wish of the Lord Aveling is to give to the Barotti family. There must be some reason for it, some tie of blood, or some obligation deep enough to defy the oblivion of ages."

Lady Melton was searching his face with a wistful struggle, as if she dared not take the hope he offered. "Your words startle me with hints of something I only vaguely understand. How can you smile over this dreadful thing?"

"Because I feel the first ray of real happiness I have known since I came to this accursed place."

"Why?" she asked, in breathless suspense.

"I see, for the first time, a way out of Ned's entanglement!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

A GLIMPSE OF THE LIGHT

THE following morning Kent was walking at a brisk pace through a by-path little frequented. It was grass-grown and nearly lost to the eye. In the morning light Kent was seen to be perceptibly aged. His usually fresh color had become ashy, his expression was of perpetual strain. He did not spare a glance for the landscape about him. When it did intrude upon his meditations as he sent an occasional glance over the bleak stubble, it brought something withering, almost of hate, into his darkened countenance. Everywhere he looked it spoke of death. The trees were almost bare. His senses sickened at the sight of ruined castles and abbeys, and the crowded cemeteries, glimpsed through the thinning foliage, peopled the very earth beneath his feet with continual reminders of bygone lives. A passionate exclamation broke from his lips, "Oh, for the breath of that dear land where the axe rings in virgin forest and the plough rips up the primeval ocean bed!"

A look of fresh interest sprang up in his jaded countenance at sight of a low, rambling building which a turn in the path revealed. He was puzzled to make it out as he drew nearer. It was not large enough for a manor-house; and yet something of dignity and importance gave assurance of its being more than a mere farmhouse. He halted for a moment, running his eye over the diamond-paned casements, the ivy that heavily draped the walls, and the clustered chimneys that rose from the roof. A few rooks circled in the air above the house. The tinkle of a sheep-bell sounded faintly. Otherwise there was no sign of life about. Instead, there was a silence which struck the attention, coupled with a closed, inhospitable look about the whole place that did not promise a welcome to the stranger.

Kent stood with his hand on the gate, thinking over the odds and ends of knowledge which he had picked up. So this was Mariola's home—Saxholm Grange he had been told they called the place, and by every sign they were not peasants at all, but some incalculable cross between the peasant and the lord. His countenance brightened and his step was lighter as he passed through the gate and knocked at the door. It bore an old-fashioned knocker of carved brass and great beauty.

By good luck Mariola opened the door and, with

her friendliest smile, invited him to enter. He stepped into a large hall. Its size was somewhat unexpected. It was dark, even gloomy, but he received an impression of stateliness, as if something noble had been masked. This impression contrasted oddly with something of the ascetic's scorn that nowhere left tangible marks, and yet so dominated the apartment that one read it like a human trait. Although Kent had never exchanged a word with the master of Saxholm Grange, that person stood revealed. It might almost have been an ancestral gift, that magnetic, compelling force of personality.

He did not have long to receive and arrange the impressions that crowded on him, for Mariola crossed the floor with light steps and knocked at a closed door. He had only time for fleeting glimpses of what looked like family portraits, some rare furniture from the Middle Ages, and specimens of old silver or pewter, he could not be sure in the gloom of the hall, when Mariola turned the knob, pushed in the door, and beckoned him to enter. He stepped across the threshold.

If he had been astonished before, he was at a loss to express his feelings now. Every step into this curious house revealed fresh and deeper mysteries. The man he had known as Mariola's father wore the garb of a common laborer; and yet, as Kent remembered, that scorn of the out-

ward shapes of circumstance which was so clear and strong a note of the daily living here. This room was the home of a scholar, of one possessed of liberal culture and a vital knowledge of the deep things of the soul. A long room, lined on all sides with bookcases, which reached the ceiling at one end. There were pictures and bronzes and marbles. Over the mantel hung a Romney portrait, a bewildering beauty, all pink and pearl. And yet there was nothing lavish, everything had been placed with a sparing hand, ringing an endless change upon the manner of this peasant-lord which had so baffled Kent before.

But there was an occupant of the room to whom Kent was obliged to pay his devoir. A stately person, to whom Mariola presented him. "My grandmother, Mme. Barotti," she said, with a shy smile, and quietly left the room.

Mme. Barotti was dressed quite simply in black, her white hair neatly folded under a lace cap. Her manner was full of English reserve, but Kent observed she had Mariola's friendliness. He surmised that she might not be unwilling to further his ends. She invited him very civilly to a seat, and then bent to her work, some homely knitting, a pair of great mittens.

Kent was at a loss. It was one thing to resolve upon this visit; it was quite another to extract useful information from the very collected

person opposite, clicking her needles in great composure and who, for all Kent knew, might preserve that placid silence the rest of the morning. He racked his brain, but every idea was dismissed as fast as it came. He watched the needles for what seemed an endless time; then something above invited his attention. He looked up, and rose from his chair with a startled exclamation. Mme. Barotti regarded him in slight surprise.

"I beg your pardon, but"—Kent was staring at a picture hanging on the wall—"is that a portrait?"

Mme. Barotti followed his eyes to the picture, a grim-faced man of middle age. His hair was turning white.

"It is one of our ancestors," she said quietly.

The fire in Kent's face leaped into a blaze.

"When did he live?" he asked abruptly. No answer was returned. He looked hastily at Mme. Barotti. She was regarding him with gentle disdain, a spark of anger in it.

"I beg your pardon," said Kent. "It was surprise that made me rude." He waited.

"He lived in the time of Elizabeth," said the gentlewoman's voice. "He was one of the notable men of the Reformation."

"A Protestant?"

Mme. Barotti inclined her head. She dropped

her eyes and fell to knitting again. The furtive glance she occasionally directed at Kent betrayed some inward disquiet. Kent looked again at the portrait. A Protestant, and the Templar to whom he bore so strong a likeness was a devout Catholic. The same fanatical temper burned furiously in both.

There was something deeper still in the mind of the woman opposite, of which Kent caught but a gleam. There was something behind her trembling silence,—an appeal to the human current flowing beyond her reach. So far Kent could read. His hopes were running high. He continued to regard the picture.

“If you had not told me that it was a portrait of your ancestor, I should have thought it was one of Mr. Aveling’s.”

Now he had snapped her cool reserve. She dropped her work, with a string of startled Italian, as if, under the pressure of emotion, she had lapsed into a more familiar tongue than her precise English. Kent did not speak. After an interval she gathered up her knitting, but her old hands trembled like leaves in the wind.

“That was why I asked you when he lived,” went on Kent.

“And when did this—this ancestor of Mr. Aveling live?” she asked. Her features worked excitedly.

"He lived in the twelfth century."

This piece of information completed Mme. Barotti's undoing. She clasped her hands together and bent her head. Kent saw a tear roll down and fall upon her work. He rose to his feet.

"Don't go!" She raised an imploring face and motioned him to his seat. "Forgive the tremors of an old woman. These agitations are only for the young." She brushed away the tears that glistened on her soft, old cheeks, and then turned to him. He became aware that some barrier between them had melted.

"There is some mysterious tie between Mr. Aveling's house and mine that has cast a gloom upon us these many centuries," she began.

"Centuries!" echoed Kent.

"The Grange can boast a line almost as long as Roxmoor," she said proudly.

"Forgive me—I did not know. I was only wondering at the strength of this tie, which could endure so long and not snap," he said enigmatically. He lifted a glowing countenance to the old one regarding him in curious quiet.

"Mr. Aveling is an old friend of mine," he said, in a thrilled voice. "His life, we believe, is in danger and we are trying to save it, if we can."

"My daughter's husband is not friendly to the

Avelings," she said, with a sharp withdrawal from the co-operation he seemed to ask.

"Yes, I know. But Mr. Aveling is most anxious—is *impelled* to serve your grandchild and her father."

The forces friendly to his cause which were at work within broke down the last defence. Mme. Barotti dropped her eyes and seemed to think. Then she raised them full upon Kent.

"I feel some strong compulsion to confide in you. Will you swear to use the information I shall give you to serve us—and Mr. Aveling's extremity?"

"Gladly."

She sank back in her chair. When she again looked at Kent something like a dim hope shone in her face. "It is our century-old sorrow that I am about to tell you. It has shut us away from human contact in a chill and solitary separation, and *somehow* we must break its power."

The note of passion that rang through her last words came with startling force from the delicate, old lips through which it sounded. She began her story in a low, clear voice:

"Mr. Aveling's ancestor of the twelfth century was pleased, for some reason, to shower benefits upon our ancestor of the same period. Saxholm Grange itself is a gift from him, and we have the tradition of numerous benefactions.

There was a fitting sense of gratitude preserved within the family for two centuries. Then a younger son of the house was seized with a sort of mania on the occasion of a visit to Roxmoor. He conceived a violent dislike for the place and its people and endeavored, by every means, to inoculate the family with his pestilent hate. Failing in this, he left home in a fury and was never heard from again.

“The family, meanwhile, lived on in the Grange, but a coolness grew up between the two houses, the result, in part, of capricious treatment by the Roxmoor family. Now they showered attentions; again they passed our people with blank faces. These hostilities have continued, with few interruptions, to the present time.

“My husband died young, and I took my daughter, our only child, to the Continent to finish her education. She met there a young man of fine Italian family, but saturated with socialist tendencies. They were married, and we returned to England. In the course of the following year my daughter’s husband was found to be descended from the missing son of our house, so they are of the same blood. My daughter and I were inclined to be friendly with the Avelings, but her husband still cherishes the ancient grudge. And there my sorrow lies. For to me the past is buried with its misunderstandings, but Barotti

still draws us all into his gloom and solitude. Roxmoor has some fascination for Mariola, and her father is in torment when she is there, and between them——” She paused, with a trembling lip, and, clasping both hands piteously together, raised imploring eyes to Kent: “Do you know any reason for this curious hate which animates Barotti? It makes him bitter and solitary; and yet I believe he cannot tell any more than you or I *why* he hates.”

Kent’s face was keen with thought.

“Do you know any reason for the extraordinary interest in your family shown by the Lord Aveling?”

“No. There is no reason.”

“Then, Mme. Barotti, when we find that, we have the key which unlocks the riddle.”

“Do not the records tell anything?” she asked, in perplexity.

“That is what I mean to find out. Mr. Bateson, the family lawyer, will have any available information.”

Before she could speak again, the door was flung open and Mme. Barotti, with a shrinking, timid manner, presented Kent to the man who entered, Mariola’s father. It was an intensely dramatic moment for them all, for the master of the Grange admitted few visitors, and Kent read that closer drawn doors followed each invasion. From

Mme. Barotti's hurried and broken words he had gathered that the exclusive life at the Grange was becoming hermit-like and that the Madame's friendly soul craved the solace of congenial friends. Kent regarded Barotti closely. Behind the man's hauteur there was something which Kent was puzzled to make out, something that belied his chilly manner, as if, after all, it was his nature to be friendly. Kent decided to test him.

"Mr. Barotti, the necessity of a friend in great danger was the cause of my visit here this morning. That same necessity may lead me to ask an interview within a few days. Should that occasion arise, may I ask this indulgence? It is for Mr. Aveling."

Mr. Barotti's gloomy visage did not change expression as he spoke.

"I know of no service which I can render Mr. Aveling," he said harshly.

"There may be a service within your power—the saving of a human life."

Barotti's eyes flashed as they met Kent's. He gravely inclined his head, with the attitude of bending to a yoke.

"I would be little of a man," he said, in a heavy, musical voice, "if I failed to meet the human claim. Command me at your leisure."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CORE OF THE SECRET

KENT hurried through London's chill streets the next morning at an early hour. The sky was dark and lowering and the air was very cold. Rain fell in a fine drizzle and the wind blew in angry gusts. A heavy fog blotted out the buildings. The passing crowd was like a parade of ghosts. Even the noise of the crowded streets came muffled. Kent shivered with more than cold, for on such a day the phantom that dogged his steps seemed more alive than the unreal forms about him which the fog spirited away into a world of dreams. The tragic sense of an irrevocable past, of the living force and power of experience which exhales from bygone lives like a tangible thing, was more forcible than ever in this vast city, standing since the Cæsars. The life of the spirit remained immortal among time's mutations.

Kent hurried faster, turning at last into an arched doorway. He climbed several dingy flights of stairs, searching until he found the name he wanted. He was presently ushered into the pri-

vate office of Mr. Bateson, who rose to meet him with an anxious, solemn countenance.

"No,—nothing has happened," said Kent, in answer to his look. "But I am anxious to make something happen. Have you a little time for me?"

Mr. Bateson bowed with his grand air, never forgetting his dignity as the adviser of a great and important family.

"I always have time for Mr. Aveling's affairs. I judge that you wish to consult me about them." He motioned Kent to a seat.

Kent drew his chair to a table. Mr. Bateson took a seat opposite and dryly watched proceedings.

"Now, Mr. Bateson, do you happen to know a worthy gentleman named Barotti, owner of Saxholm Grange?"

Mr. Bateson bowed.

"Do you happen, also, to know that gentleman's family history?"

"I do."

Kent directed a keen glance at him. Mr. Bateson maintained his judicial dignity.

"Yesterday I had an opportunity to learn that history," Kent went on. "Very interesting it was."

"As you say, very interesting," softly echoed Mr. Bateson.

At this point Kent experienced some annoyance. He felt that it was not quite pleasant to find such entire agreement, and began afresh.

"I have only a slight acquaintance with Mr. Aveling's ancestral history, of which we have had some discussion before. It would now be of great use to improve that acquaintance. I daresay you could supply me with the means."

Mr. Bateson softly rubbed his hands together.

"You are aware of the book which I have in preparation concerning Roxmoor," he said. "I will show you what I have already written and give you the original papers which I used." He rose and went to a safe, which he unlocked and drew out a mass of papers, depositing them upon the table. Some of them were yellow and stained and the writing nearly lost.

"These are the records of Roxmoor's past," he said solemnly.

"Are they originals?" asked Kent, as he saw the ancient dates.

"Some of the originals are only fragments. But their contents have been preserved with great care, for the Avelings have cherished their heritage. Many of these are copies, renewed from time to time."

Kent was eagerly running them over. "What

shall I do?" he asked. "May I take them up to Roxmoor?"

Mr. Bateson's manner became magnificent.

"I should not feel justified in allowing papers so valuable out of my possession. But the room is sufficiently commodious," with an impressive wave of the hand. "I can promise you freedom from interruption——" He paused.

Kent touched the papers with his hand. "It will take hours," he said. "You will be inconvenienced."

Mr. Bateson bowed with just the right mingling of dignity and humility:

"It is in the service of Mr. Aveling!"

It was hours before Kent had the main lines of the story in shape, torn from old records of birth and death, and from letters and journals, written in unintelligible English. But the result was full of illuminating thought.

The Aveling family was one of consequence when William the Conqueror invaded England. In the upheaval that followed the Battle of Hastings they fled to Italy, the family estates falling into the hands of the Norman nobles. There were some confused traditions here of attempts to regain the estates, but nothing authentic, until the growing opulence of the family gave hopes of

ultimate return to their native land. The Crusades had given a tremendous impulse to commerce, and the Avelings grew rich in the trade that whitened the Mediterranean.

Thus fortified, the head of the family attached himself to the train of Henry Plantagenet, then in France. His ascent to the throne restored the Aveling estates, and they returned to England.

But long residence in Italy had wrought a subtle change in the blood, so that English ways and airs were irksome to their languorous temper. Much time was passed in Italy, and an Italian bride was brought to the manor. The rooms in the so-called "Italian Wing" were hers, transformed to give her the semblance of the Italy for which she pined.

There was only one surviving child when this pair died. The age was rude. Sickness and battle left only one, a late-comer in the home when the rest were grown. This was a daughter, a young, tender thing, who married early. Her husband was slain in battle six months before their son was born. It appeared to be a marriage merely of convenience, and soon after the birth of her child she fell in love with a nobleman at the court, who hastened the nuptials, the rude manners of the time putting no obstacle to his plans,—a strange, dominating personality, who sprang up unknown in Henry's court. His wife

fell completely under his influence, so that he was, in effect, the lord of the manor. Within a year she presented him with a son, dying at his birth, leaving thus her true successor, the son by the first marriage, in his power. According to her will, her husband was to enjoy the rights and place of the Lord Aveling during his lifetime, when the estate would pass to the oldest son by right of entail. This was a privilege of the reigning heir, sanctioned by ancient custom in the family, but long since fallen into disuse. Lady Aveling, it would appear, revived this law, her husband assumed the position of the heir, and, with this power in his grasp, rose to a commanding place in the English court.

It was an age of change—of ruptured traditions—of movement from a simple to a complex, national life. At a time when Henry was curtailing the strength of the feudal lords he took much pleasure in this powerful figure among the lesser nobles. The legality of the will by which this desirable leader became the Lord Aveling did not concern Henry; but the brilliant service he rendered the king did. Step by step he rose in the English court, always master of himself and the shrewdest strategy which saw far into the future,—a strategy too profound for unalloyed self-seeking.

Presently it appeared that the Lord Aveling

had been summoned to Italy on some important mission. When he returned, it was with lamentations and mourning robes. His elder son, he said, had died suddenly in Italy of a fever. A small coffin was placed with due honors in the family tomb and a period of mourning observed.

There commenced here to creep evidences of a disturbed and anxious mind into the ancient records. By the time his son had reached his majority the old lord was a changed man. Another journey to Italy was undertaken, and when they returned they brought a new servant, a young Italian, who had already become a favorite with his master. It appeared the young man had left his heart in his native country; so the Lord Aveling sent for the girl to come to England, for he would not hear of the young man's absence. At the wedding they were nearly buried under a weight of gifts, among which were a house and an annuity; and with this beginning the peasant family acquired a permanence which ran steadily through the records. Some indestructible tie bound their fate together.

Now followed a period of still greater disquiet in the old lord. None of his honors could satisfy the tormented man, bending on his knees until the cold gray of dawn in supplication to the spirit of his dead wife. He feared to approach himself the wrath of Heaven, and directed his

prayers to that gentle mediator. But now he saw another hope, as if in answer to his petition. The flames of the Crusades lighted every corner of Europe. The troubled man resolved to make the pilgrimage to the Holy City and secure the blessing promised.

It was then thought a most pious act to visit the burial-place of saints and martyrs; and that prayers and tears of penitence, offered upon consecrated ground, could cleanse the blackest soul. So the Lord Aveling was escorted out of his country by a great band of friends, carrying the gifts, a staff and wallet, and the priest's benediction upon his holy enterprise.

He travelled to the Holy Sepulchre, and prayed upon every sacred spot which tradition had preserved; bathed in the holy waters of Jordan, and brought the palm-branch to lay upon the altar of the manor-chapel. He joined the Knight Templars and endowed inns and hospitals on the way to Jerusalem, erecting shrines and crosses where the devout pilgrim could rest and pray and gain the indulgence of Heaven. For these pious acts he was held in high esteem, and this, from his journals, was his sharpest scourge.

This was the history from which Kent roused himself as a clock, somewhere, struck the noon hour. He leaned forward and touched a bell. Mr. Bateson immediately appeared.

"It seems to me, Mr. Bateson, from these records that a crime has been committed," Kent began. Mr. Bateson's expression was so bland and self-possessed that he paused.

"Exactly," murmured excellent Mr. Bateson.

"A crime against an ancestor of the Barotti family," said Kent.

"My own conclusion," purred Mr. Bateson. He stood with one hand behind his back, the other held his eyeglasses. His head was inclined slightly forward, his eyes were dropped. He looked the ideal repository of family secrets.

Kent stared at him for a brief space.

"Why, Mr. Bateson, was this knowledge not used before?" he asked sternly.

"What could it do?" enquired the cool voice.

"Why was it not used to solve the mystery?" Kent persisted, irritably rattling the papers upon the table.

"How could it be used?" said Bateson softly. "The old lord gained the inheritance by fraudulent means, perhaps; but how?—and who was defrauded? There are no papers—you see the difficulty. Reasonable men must have proofs. The estate is large—and important." There was the faintest smile about his thin lips. "We could not counsel Mr. Aveling to turn over his inheritance to the Barottis," he remarked, in a deprecating voice. "That would be fantastic."

Kent's ire cooled to the working-point. The wrong which had been done was clear enough to probable conjecture; but it was not susceptible of proof. And, if it could not be defined in legal terms, he could not put it in vital touch with the ban upon wretched Aveling; and, so far as his safety was concerned, the secret might have as well have remained unknown. The real core of the problem revealed itself with such sudden force that he longed to tear the papers before him into shapeless fragments, from mere desire to exert his strength upon something. He wiped the moisture from his brow and fell to gathering up the copious extracts he had made.

"Let us hope, Mr. Kent, that the present attempts will be more successful."

Kent sprang up at the sound of the cool, mocking voice, and, with a few brief words, quitted the room.

"It is a marvel how like a schoolboy my friend Bateson can make a grown man feel," he said, between his teeth.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ONLY WAY

ROXMOOR looked more repellent than ever to Kent as he approached that evening. It was nearly dark when he arrived and only the towers and battlements were visible; the lights in the windows glared like evil eyes. Mrs. Aveling sprang up as he came in; she had been weeping.

"Come, quick," she said, catching up a candle as she sped across the hall.

Kent followed her rapid pace. She passed swiftly on to the older portion of the house. When they reached the secret panel she paused a moment, with her hand upon the spring.

"He has been in the old library since last night. We cannot persuade him to move." There was an expression upon her face that drew a question from Kent.

"Why did he go there?"

Her face quivered, but she mastered herself with an effort.

"He had been thinking—had been very quiet, and suddenly he rose from his seat, the glitter of a horrible resolution in his face——" She fal-

tered and then went on: "His smile was dreadful to see as he spoke: 'I am going for it, Aline. Tell Kent. I am going——' And he sprang out of the room before I could move." She stood with a pitiful, quivering look.

Kent could not meet her eyes. What struggle might issue, he did not know, but Aveling had dared the final test. While Kent faced with unbelievable horror the elements which disclosed the only sure way, Aveling had taken the plunge—and alone!

A shiver ran through Mrs. Aveling as her worst fears received confirmation in Kent's averted gaze. She pressed the spring upon which her hand rested, the panel slid open, and she stepped through.

When they entered the library Kent could, at first, make nothing out in the gloom. Then he saw the glow of a lamp in the distance. As he drew nearer he could see Aveling seated in a chair, the whole man expressive of one in mental and moral abandon. His countenance was vacant, his eyes rolled wildly. As Kent approached he shivered slightly. Kent laid his hand upon the nerveless arm that was nearest. Aveling looked up, with a wavering response: "Well, friend, thou hast been long upon thy journey. Mayhap, Roxmoor is dull to thee."

There seemed to be a struggle, as if the old

memories and habit overlaid and mingled with the new. Kent waited a moment; Aveling's expression was brightening, his eye wavered less. Then Kent spoke:

"Come, Ned,—come with me."

Aveling rose at once. He leaned heavily on Kent's arm as he was led back through the corridors to his room. They persuaded him to take a little nourishment, and then he fell asleep. Kent beckoned Mrs. Aveling out of the room.

"Do you realize how ill you are?" he sternly asked.

"I don't know," she wearily replied. "You were not here, and I could not leave him."

"I'll have no occasion to leave again," he said. "But to-night you are going to have some rest. You have had none since I left."

"I won't leave Ned," she said sharply.

"Mrs. Aveling, I shall have to think for you in Ned's place," he said, in a firm, clear voice. "And you are going to rest to-night, for Mary Endicott and Lady Melton are coming to stay with you. And you will go to the other end of the house and sleep,—if we have to *drag* you there and tie you down."

Looking into his resolute face, she knew that he would do it. "Won't you even let me share his last few hours?" she pitifully asked.

"Yes, when they come," he said solemnly.

"But they will not be here, please God, for many a year."

She sprang forward, eagerly clutching his arm:

"You know something more. You have heard something. Oh, don't keep it away from me!"

"Mrs. Aveling, I know nothing more than you do. I have gained a little further knowledge of Roxmoor's history, and that is positively all."

"Then, why do you offer me this empty hope?" she wailed.

"Because it is not empty. Three days ago I asked you to pray to all your gods."

"I did—to the one good God I never doubt, even in all this strange trial."

Kent started. "That was what Ned said," he exclaimed, in wonder. "When that mysterious face in the gravestone was revealed to me, he said, as if in answer to what I said to you, the utter despair I felt, 'Never doubt that the good God sent you here.' And, although I know no more, and see little further into the darkness, I hope, with some strange assurance, that all will yet go well with Ned."

Mrs. Aveling burst into a torrent of relieving tears, and Kent led her away, returning afterward to his vigil in Aveling's room. If Aveling were himself when morning came, he meant to lay the matter before him. But he set his teeth

against the torment of a horrible foreboding. Suppose that Aveling, in his own person, should never again emerge from that oblivion where he had plunged!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FINAL PLUNGE

AVELING slept soundly all night long, and woke quiet and refreshed and in entire possession of himself. After breakfast he asked for an interview with Kent, and they were left alone together. Aveling began at once to speak.

"The time has come, Kent, to make the last throw," he said, with solemn earnestness.

"I don't know what you mean," Kent replied, "but I earnestly urge you not to act in haste. Your reserves are small and we need time."

"There is no time left, Kent. It will all be over, whether for good or ill, in three days."

Kent glanced quickly at him. Their secrecy had not deceived him. Aveling went on:

"Caution is useless now. I have only one chance, and the sooner I take it the better. But I want to tell you first that it has been through your untiring service that I have gained the insight and the courage to take the final plunge."

"The final plunge?"

"Yes, I must give up myself and soul to that horrible clamor."

"But you have done that," said Kent, wondering what he meant.

Aveling shook his head. "No, Kent, I have never been quite frank with you, for, when the soul lingers on the borders of extinction, it answers but two instincts,—secrecy and flight. I could not formulate that dead man's conduct in my own person, and I have never dared to give up my whole self to what seems like annihilation. Kent, never in Stygian caves can greater blackness yawn before the soul than that awful choice, and yet it lies before me, and from it there is no escape."

"But, Aveling," said Kent, appalled by the man's terrible resolution. "You have tried this. Don't run greater risks. You may be facing useless danger."

"That is where I have not been quite frank. The old Lord Aveling hid somewhere the proofs of another heir, and the way to find them is to let him possess my body and reincarnate that guilty act. I'd gladly give the manor and its holdings twice over to escape this descent into the shades of death. But nothing else will right the wrong, nothing but the surrender of *myself*. You know how carefully we have sacked every corner of the manor, so this is the only way. And the reason why that reincarnation has never taken place is because, down in the depths of my

shivering soul, I kept something from surrender. All but that small corner,—body, voice, memory, mind,—but the essence and core of me I did not give. And that is the price.”

He did not speak for a moment. Kent felt a blindness sweep over him, for he knew that this was the way to put Aveling in vital touch with the secret. Aveling began again, in a musing tone:

“What pitiful stuff a human soul is made of! Last night I resolved to make this final test, and left Aline, poor child, to endure the horror alone, for I felt so sure of my strength and dared not risk delay. But my resolution failed, Kent, for I needed you,—*you*, to put fire and whirlwind into my heart and drive me into that place of demons.”

He drifted into a period of profound thought, from which he roused himself with sudden vigor:

“Kent, I am a weakling. He and I may, after all, be made of the same coward stuff. With all his ghastly penances he could not take the only step that was of any use. And neither could I in that terrible loneliness. Except for you, with your resolute grasp of vital law,—your splendid courage to venture into forbidden ways,—I could only miserably perish.”

“You overrate what I have done,” said Kent gently.

"No, Kent. You always cleared my course with your wise, powerful head and your passionate justice."

He broke forth again after a period of silent musing:

"I must die—die!—suffer the pangs of death,—go into the dim world of the disembodied and become the instrument of a dreadful resurrection!"

His face glowed with a baleful lustre. The risk of his fearful purpose was greater than anything Kent had dreamed. Kent blindly reached out and grasped his arm:

"Aveling!—I implore you,—don't take that awful risk!"

"I must—I have felt it from the first,—the struggle was always there, and now I am resolved to go."

"Wait a little longer. Perhaps we can find another way."

"Why, Kent, I am dying, anyway." He held up his hand, transparent as a piece of alabaster. "Look at that. Every drop of blood has been drawn in the struggle. And, if I venture from this room, I will fall an immediate victim of the thrall, and some time it will master me. But now, through the motive you have furnished me, there is just this chance to break the curse. That dead man wants something done, and, when I get his

will accomplished, I may be released. There is no other way."

"But think, Ned. You are handling things you don't understand. Are you even sure of what you are going for?"

"Yes. The Lord Aveling hid somewhere proof that Barotti is the rightful heir, and, if I give up all my powers to him, he'll come and find the hidden papers."

Kent spoke with slow and deep solemnity when Aveling finished:

"Suppose, when this act of restitution is accomplished, you could not again possess yourself, for you say you'll give him complete dominion. Suppose the exchange of personality should become permanent?"

"I have little fear of that."

"Think well, man. Would not a second opportunity seem doubly to be prized? Do you feel so sure that life, with a fresh trial of its testing, would have no charm for one who failed on his first pilgrimage?"

"Yes, by Heaven, I do! If ever a soul knew the awfulness of remorse, this man, who has borne the scourge for seven centuries, can have no courage for fresh iniquity or be tempted to filch my chance away. Surely, Kent, we may give a tortured soul that much charity."

It was the sweet brotherliness which had al-

ways made Aveling so beloved. Kent looked at the quiet, solemn face, and he seemed to see a new Aveling, shorn of his mirth, but rising to meet the responsibilities of his blood with the fortitude and glory of the spiritual man which the human pilgrimage wrings from the dust. It was the chance of the cosmic process,—bearing in blood and tears the weight of another's sin to keep the eternal justice true. For Kent knew that Aveling's merry spirits were crushed forever, that not even his elastic spirits could quite rebound after so deep a descent into the mysteries of being. The human destiny seemed doubly precious since its dignity and worth might demand such ransom.

“Then you go without fear?” asked Kent.

“No, I have a deadly and consuming fear,—that my strength may fail me at the crisis and I may not have the resolution to return. Then, Kent, my fate rests with you.”

He paused for a moment, and then resumed, a deeper intensity of meaning in his face:

“Kent, did you ever consider the significance that may lie in the lamp that burns beneath the Templar's portrait?”

“No—I don't think I ever did,” Kent slowly replied.

“Then, think of this and seal it with hope and courage. The Templar placed that lamp beneath his picture and left his curse on any one who

should neglect to keep it burning. Some time that lamp went out, and some time later a curse befell the manor. But no one thought about the lamp until I came and re-lit it."

Kent suddenly raised an illuminated face.

"Aveling, it must be that you are meant to lift the curse."

Aveling nodded, a slight smile broke across his pale lips. "I believe that somewhere it is written that the fates mean kindly to our race, purged of its ancient sin."

Kent's face kindled.

"I can let you go now, Ned, with some courage. Tell me just what it is that you want me to do."

"You are to go with me wherever I go and keep alive that sympathy which runs between us, for with that you'll drag me back, if a chance remains. Keep your hand upon me and my ear alive to your voice. Never let that link break."

Kent waited. "And then?"

Aveling turned his steady gaze upon him, and deep within Kent saw a glow rise.

"Then, Kent, call,—and, I swear by Heaven, I'll come!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MAN WHO REAPS

AVELING watched Kent quietly, and then said: "Ask Dr. Warren to come to me. I am anxious to begin."

Without a word Kent went out, and presently returned with Dr. Warren, to whom Aveling briefly told his purpose. The doctor merely nodded and held his peace. Aveling's strength had failed enormously over night. No Aveling had ever survived the final test. Either way, it mattered little in his judgment, and he watched the last preparations in silence. Aveling gave some directions to Kent in case he did not live, and then shook hands quietly with Dr. Warren.

"Would you like to see Mrs. Aveling?" asked the doctor.

Aveling's face quivered, but he turned a smile of quiet confidence on Kent. "No—I'll wait, for I shall see her again," he said, in firm, clear tones. He and Kent went out together.

Apparently, it was not the often repeated change Kent had seen which was to place Aveling's self in another's hands. He went quietly,

through the house, looking at the pictured Templar here and there, and betook himself to the Italian Wing, for here lay the vital memories of the man. Aveling went through the Wing to a small oratory which opened off the bed-chamber, and, kneeling before a tiny altar, gave himself up to a season of devotion. Then he rose and, stepping backward, his eyes fixed upon a picture of the Templar, lay there, silent and staring.

There was no sudden or startling change, but, as Kent watched, one by one the links that held Aveling to life snapped and he sank gradually into a perfectly apathetic state. Kent judged it best to summon the doctor, and together they watched Aveling slowly fade out of life. When an hour had passed, Kent touched his arm and called, and Aveling made a slight response. Then Dr. Warren tried, but he did not answer. He moved only at Kent's bidding, seeming in his deepest apathy to retain obedience to Kent's will. Otherwise he gave no sign of life.

At noon-day, Lady Melton came to beg that Mrs. Aveling might see her husband for a moment. Some one opened the door into the oratory. She glanced at the lifeless figure and wrung her hands. Mrs. Aveling came into the hallway where they were, and Dr. Warren motioned to let her pass.

Only Kent was there when she knelt by Avel-

ing's chair. There was nothing but the steady rise and fall of his breath to tell her that he lived. When she sobbed his name, and kissed and wept upon his waxen hand, he made no more response than a clay image might have done.

She grew quiet after a while, and, rising to her feet, withdrew to a corner, watching him in silence. Kent did not speak to her, but presently he saw the lonely figure slip quietly from the room.

Kent watched in agony that deadly wrestle of soul with soul that stretched across the centuries, laying low one after another, until this remnant of the ancient stock remained alone. The thing seemed so near,—the matter so clear to reasonable thought; but it taxed his fortitude to see Aveling locked in that death-like submission to another will where no one might reach him. For hours the trance held sway. More and more he came to resemble his dead progenitor. His pulses slowed, he grew more pallid, his breathing deeper and more machine-like; his whole being more given over to the bidding of that powerful will. It began to wear the look of doom.

Toward the end of the afternoon Kent went out upon the terrace for a stroll, to relieve the tension of his mind. Night was falling fast as he gazed out upon the valley; the world looked wild and menacing. The sky was full of gray,

scudding clouds. On the horizon a yellow light burned through, like eating fire. He turned away, shivering slightly, as if the sullen clouds meant evil. He paced along the stone pavement. Something overhead caught his eye and, as he looked upward, a huge, black shape, like a bird of prey, circled around a jagged turret. He watched the flapping wings bear the ominous thing away, and then, with a muttered curse for his own forebodings, entered the house and returned to the Italian Wing.

When he pushed open the door into the small oratory it seemed so deathly still in there, as if no human breath were drawn. The very shadows were stricken with a motionless rigor. To one side of the room Dr. Warren watched with folded arms.

Aveling lay blank and silent as Kent approached. The motive and power which mark the man had fled. He waited, as a swept and garnished room might wait a tenant. He had reached the lowest point to which his physical powers could sink and yet return. His gaze was fixed; nothing moved behind the empty windows of his soul. Kent peered into a deserted habitation.

With a stirring of anxious dread, he placed his hand on Aveling's arm and spoke to him. There was not the slightest answering thrill to show that Aveling heard. It could not be pos-

sible he would not answer, thought Kent. He tried again. But, heavily as he pressed the nerveless arm and loudly as he called, there was not the finest chord that he could set a-quiver. The slender thread along which Aveling's senses crept to Kent had broken. There was not a single link between them now.

A certainty of disaster seized Kent. He had relied so steadfastly upon the holding of that tie. It was the service which Aveling so confidently trusted for his salvation. In its grasp he had ventured among the powers of darkness to break his thralldom, and now, between his lost soul and safe return, there stretched a blank. Kent was unprepared for such hideous defeat. He withdrew a step and let the rising flood sweep over him.

He knew nothing more until a cold rim pressed against his lips. "Drink! Drink!" said Dr. Warren. Kent swallowed the draught.

"Courage,—courage. The battle is not over," said Dr. Warren's solemn voice.

"But I have lost my hold on him," said Kent hoarsely.

"I do not think so. I believe it was necessary for him to pass beyond your summons for a while."

"He made the trial only in the confidence that I could recall him," said Kent.

“Yes, after the final test, when the papers have been found. But in the search for them he must go alone; for, after all, the burden is on the master of Roxmoor. It is his to give or to withhold. He alone is in the chain of sequences that lead to the hiding-place, and only through him can the guilty act be reborn.”

He paused for a moment, as if considering Aveling's painful travail and its relation to human discipline, as he strove to bring to this young, vigorous mind the lesson of limitation which he himself had learned in a lifetime of daily contact with the mystery of suffering. His harsh face was touched with feeling as he spoke, placing a hand on Kent's shoulder:

“The service of brotherhood must yield to its limitations; for the human life, in its most tragic moments, is solitary. The soul must bear alone the curse of its blood. For the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even to the uttermost generation!”

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MAN WHO SOWS

“BAROTTI refuses to come.”

Kent looked in dismay at Dr. Warren, who was speaking.

“But he promised to talk to me,” said Kent.

“He says he will, gladly, in any place but Roxmoor. His resolution on that point he declares to be irrevocable.”

Kent glanced at Aveling's motionless figure.

“Must you see Barotti?” asked Dr. Warren.

“I feel that I absolutely must.”

The doctor relapsed into silence.

“What are the chances of my being needed here?” asked Kent.

Dr. Warren replied in his dryest manner. “As you must see Barotti, and he refuses to come, I see but one thing to do. I do not anticipate that Mr. Aveling's wakening will be sudden. There would probably be time to summon you. Little more than twenty-four hours have passed yet.”

“Then it would better to go at once.”

Dr. Warren nodded, and Kent left the room.

The afternoon was clear and sharp; last night's sullen clouds had vanished. Kent, walking rapidly, soon reached Saxholm Grange. The door opened just as Kent's hand touched the knocker, and Mr. Barotti signed to him to enter. He led the way to the library in silence, and, placing a chair for his guest, fixed his dark eyes upon Kent. They were tawny and wild to-day.

"I expected you," he said abruptly.

"Then let us proceed. I have little time to spare." Kent looked down at the floor for a moment's thought, and then raised his eyes. "Why, Mr. Barotti, do you hate my friend Aveling?"

A flame leaped into Barotti's eyes.

"Before God, man, I don't know!" he said, with a heaving breast. He clenched his hands, as they lay upon the arms of his chair, until they shone like marble. "I think it is *that* which raises such a devilish passion in me—that I *don't* know,—that there *is* no reason,—and I yet hate. I,—Michel Barotti, the slave of a heedless generation, ready to help a king or a beggar, it matters not; bartering my life for the cause of the spirit,—yet degraded and lowered when I meet my own soul in solitude and see there the stains of unbrotherly hate!"

The man became transformed as the words tumbled forth in a fiery torrent, seeming to scorch

the very air. He flung a withering glance at Kent, as if he typified that overmastering fate.

After a slight pause, Kent spoke in a dry, business-like tone:

“Did it ever occur to you that, in some past century, an Aveling had wronged a Barotti?”

As Kent watched, the man before him passed through an amazing change. He started, blanched, and then sank limp into his chair. He made an effort to speak, but only a choked aspirate issued from his throat.

“Because there is a strong probability of wrong succession,” Kent went on calmly. “If you can give me any fresh facts, we can perhaps get nearer to a solution of the matter.”

Barotti put out a long, lean arm and grasped Kent. His anger had vanished. He was possessed by an unwelcome thought, which began to shape itself before his stunned senses.

“Do you mean that my child will have any share in the inheritance?”

Kent nodded. Barotti withdrew his hand and sank into his chair, white and cowed. He began to speak, after an interval:

“Pride in the human lot is a sorry thing. I have been a just man,—just in love and just in hate, I thought, until——” He started suddenly from his chair. “Why, it is part of my life, man. I tried to throttle it. I stamped in

rage upon it. I led my child to his door when I longed to tear out her eyes because they smiled at him. But it gnaws like an eating fire." He reared himself before Kent, glaring down at him. "Man, I'd sell my soul to you, if you could wash off this blot!" He struggled for a little, and then sank into his seat, shaken and trembling. A few words came in faint whisper, "Ah—that terrible loss of self!"

Kent, with a stupefied sense of the greatness of human living, watched the struggle, in its essentials a repetition of the grasp upon Aveling. Neither this shaken being nor Aveling knew the reason for the passions which swept their souls.

Barotti gradually resumed his accustomed harsh self-control, and began at once, in a low tone, a rapid recital of the history which Mme. Barotti had given, dwelling with rude eloquence upon that ancient Barotti who had raised the quarrel.

"No one knows the cause of the man's anger. He had been entertained at Roxmoor and returned home in a fury. Failing in his attempts to rouse his family, he renounced them and went to the Continent. That terrible anger formulated itself as a hatred of the rich and an espousal of the cause of the poor. Naturally he found his way to Italy, for the springs from which came that later stream of philosophy and liberal thought, which

was Italy's great glory, were rising, and his hot temper was fit material for its moulding power. From him came that loathing of class and privilege which I have the honor to cherish as one of my most precious endowments."

"There is no doubt that these two men are identical?"

"None in the least. There are plenty of authenticated documents."

Kent silently revolved the situation.

"Mr. Barotti, it is well to be prepared for all things," he said, in a measured tone. "It may chance that your child will be finally proven the sole rightful heir to Roxmoor."

"What do you mean?" said Barotti, in a terrible voice.

"I mean that the Lord Aveling of the twelfth century may have gained the heritage for his son by means of a forgery. In reading over the documents one might not think his penances more than a fine man's sense of the guilt of the human lot. But changing the point of view, made necessary by the strange scourging of Aveling's blameless life, it assumes a different look. It is clear that the elder son did not die, but was left in Italy, and afterward brought to Roxmoor as a servant, and that this young man was the first master of Saxholm Grange. Let me examine your papers to be sure of my ground."

As the full meaning of Kent's words came to Barotti, he leaped from his chair.

"My God, man! I couldn't take that place," he said, with hoarse pulls for breath.

"There will be time enough to discuss that later," said Kent sternly. "Meanwhile, Aveling is dying."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE RISEN SPIRIT

OCTOBER 30!

Kent mentally consigned all calendars to perdition as his eye fell upon this date when he entered the house. Mrs. Aveling appeared at the door of the Red Parlor as his step echoed in the hall. Her face was white as alabaster as she stood against the oak panelling of the wall. She examined Kent's face with some anxiety, inviting him to join the circle in the room. Lady Melton was there, with Mary Endicott and Betty. Dr. Warren entered a few moments after Kent. It was Lady Melton's voice that broke the silence, with a note of agitation in its music.

"Mr. Kent, you have some hope for us."

"Yes, I think I have," he said. He drew nearer to the fire and held his hands before the blaze. "Ah! that is good. The air cuts like a knife to-night."

Each one in the group furtively scanned his face as he bent shivering over the fire. It was not like him; his splendid health rarely felt the cold.

"Your heart, perhaps, can cast out the chill

with its secret hope," said Lady Melton meaningly.

He gave her an understanding smile. "Perhaps I am a little selfish," he said, but he did not go on at once. He noticed that Dr. Warren quietly slipped from the room, summoned by Watson's sphinx-like visage appearing in the hall. Leaning back in his chair, he presently began to recite the story gathered from so many sources. A deep silence fell upon his listeners, for in Kent's flowing narrative they saw Aveling issue from the struggle a re-created man. As soon as his voice ceased, Mrs. Aveling spoke:

"Then, if the old Lord Aveling usurped the place of the true heir, we can right it all by restoring the inheritance to Barotti."

"But we are not in possession of the documents which prove this," said Kent gently.

"We could give it to Barotti, anyway," she said, nervously twisting her hands.

There was a brief pause. "Barotti refuses to take the property—without proofs," said Kent, in a low voice.

Mrs. Aveling's face fell. "Is there no way to get the proofs?"

"There is only one way I know of." His words rang with intensity of feeling. Every face in the firelight lifted as Kent went on: "If Ned could be made to live through that period of Lord Avel-

ing's life when the wrong was done, he might rehearse the deed and reveal the place where the papers lie."

"And how can that be done?"

"Some suggestion must strike the trail at the right time for action," said Kent. "And when the time comes, any chance word we say to him may forge or break the chain."

Mrs. Aveling started from her seat, with paling cheeks. "What is that?" she whispered.

Dr. Warren had appeared on the threshold, looking anxiously about. Kent sprang up.

"Tell me what is wrong?" begged Mrs. Aveling. "Has anything happened?"

"There is a change in Mr. Aveling's condition. His pulse is rapidly mounting. I think Mr. Kent had better come."

The two men set off together, and, as they neared Aveling's apartment, heard the deep, sonorous tones of the Templar. They quickened their steps. Aveling stood in the centre of the old bed-chamber as they entered,—a dramatic, commanding figure. With an intense self-consciousness upon him, he had bent a stern, accusing eye on Watson, who stood before him:

"Peace, thou prating varlet! Bring me the garments I am wont to use. Whence come these ill-befitting robes?"

Watson was holding the Templar's garb. Aveling's irritation increased at the sight.

"Thou art a worthless knave, with thy indolence. What doth the Lord Aveling with things like these?" He held up the Templar uniform, ran his eye over it, and contemptuously flung it aside. "See if thou hast an eye within thy head. Perchance, it may alight upon a more proper wear." He finished with a half-humorous sarcasm.

Watson fell back, aghast. Aveling turned away, and, dropping into his easy-chair, seemed to lose himself in thought. As he paid no attention to their movements, one after another slipped from the room and gathered in the hall, a pale and silent group.

"For God's sake, sir! What shall I do?" gasped Watson.

Dr. Warren's face wore an anxious concern.

"What are we to make of this, Mr. Kent? This is, no doubt, the personality he wished to raise, but it has appeared at a different point, and, unless we can give him the connection, he will be unable to reproduce the period that is necessary."

"It must be that he has gone back to an earlier period of Lord Aveling's life," said Kent. "It was quite late in life that he became a member of

the Templar brotherhood. It may be that the robes of the earlier period were not preserved."

"What shall we do? 'E'll soon be calling, sir," urged Watson.

An insignificant incident spurred Kent's memory. "I think Mrs. Aveling might help us here," he said. "I once heard her speak of some ancient garments in connection with this very Templar robe."

Watson was hastily sent to her, and presently returned, bearing a voluminous garment, worn and ancient and yet surviving the ravages of time, as everything pertaining to the Templar seemed miraculously to do. White and trembling, he advanced within the room where Aveling waited. Kent and Dr. Warren followed.

Aveling rose from his chair and critically surveyed the garment offered him. His brow darkened with a visible effort to think, as if exact recollection just escaped him. After an interval, he suffered Watson to put it about him, and stepped forth, the ancient lord in garb and speech. He graciously inclined his head to Kent and Dr. Warren.

"Come to the castle-hall," he said.

Following some unknown turn of thought, Aveling led the way to the wing which was inhabited. Kent's fears rose. The trail was leading in the

wrong direction, but he could only helplessly follow.

They were all gathered in the hall when Aveling approached. His progress was arrested for a moment as he passed the picture that hung opposite the stairway. He seemed to compare the painted costume with the one he wore, as if not settled surely in possession of himself. An evident satisfaction cleared his brow. He made a gesture of assent and passed on.

“Room, lord and ladies; room for two noble guests who ask the courtesy of Roxmoor.” He turned, with a most stately grace, to the two men who followed him: “I pray you, gentle friends, to bide some little time within our castle walls. We cannot promise much of stirring feats of arms; but in our poor towers you may find repose and peace, hemmed safe from broil and feud.”

His glance, travelling about the room, suddenly darkened in a frown.

“How now, what do we hear? This is not meet for Roxmoor’s guests. The great hall stands dull and empty, while we huddle. Come, gentle lords and ladies; come. It were a fitter place we seek.”

He turned away, but his eye was caught by Mrs. Aveling, standing near the doorway. He looked her up and down, with some evident struggle of thought, and then advanced to her side:

“How art thou, my gentle Mariola? Holy men at orisons might envy that pure brow that bespeaks an easy soul.”

Mrs. Aveling looked down with a softened face, her young beauty ennobled by the maternal elements in her love. She bore his deference, but did not speak, uncertain of what impulse might move him next. For it was evident, from the sombre glow upon his features—the intimations of gathering force, power, initiative,—that the Usurper was slowly forging a personality, of whose scope no one knew.

The silent group looked on at the perilous thing unfolding before their eyes. Every word and action was of vital importance to build up the slowly growing memory of the past. Could she endure the double strain upon her? Aveling was not yet in full possession of this new self. Her words might break the spell.

He was seen to lift an anxious scrutiny to her face. “And yet, methinks, a melancholy lurks there, too.”

She smiled bravely down at the lifted face, her gray eyes in a tender glow. The silent listeners waited, breathless, for her to speak.

“It is the sunshine of thy love that gives me peace, dear my lord,” she murmured. “And the shadow of thy absence that makes me sad.”

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LORD AVELING

AVELING bent over and pressed his lips to her hand and, offering his arm with stately grace, passed out. The others could only helplessly follow, with the certain presage of Aveling's destination, the old hallway, closed and desolate for many centuries. It was the banqueting-hall in that early period to which his mind reverted. The darkness and the empty grate roused him to a fury. He stamped upon the floor, issuing imperious commands, while the fire grew upon the hearth and light sprang out of the darkness.

With a sudden descent into the shades, Aveling exactly reproduced what must have been the daily habit of that troubled ancestor of his. Every detail of that experience was touched upon; even the tender devotion to the much-loved Mariola. Nothing was lacking in the workings of his brain, reconstructing the memories that shifted through it.

But time sped with a horrible swiftness in that disordered consciousness. Scarcely was an order given until another followed hot upon its heels.

Days, weeks, months fled away in the space of a few short hours. Aveling's energy was boundless,—the convolutions of his excited brain a marvel. He despatched mythical couriers to a dead king. He ordered scouts to search for fancied enemies, and made allusion to events of which no one knew the meaning.

Late in the night some one took Mrs. Aveling away and compelled her to rest. Kent and Dr. Warren watched alone. Toward morning there came a change. Aveling sank into the wretchedness of some deep grief. It seemed that years passed and his sorrow did not lessen. To Kent's amazement, the man began to age before him. His shoulders bent, his eye dimmed. He crouched lower in his chair, drooped in an abject misery which engulfed the whole man.

When a new day dawned bright and clear, Aveling did not heed. The swiftly revolving drama in his brain shut out the slow passage of ordinary time. The food they placed before him was scarcely touched. He began to murmur indistinctly of some vague distress, making feeble movements, as if to rid himself of some hampering bond. His feebleness increased at a speed which threatened collapse. The murmured words became a meaningless gibber. Mrs. Aveling was hastily summoned, in the hope that her presence might stay his sinking powers. He did not stir

when she entered the room, nor by any sign show that she was near. He raised his head when urged to movement, vacantly stared at her for a moment, and then turned indifferently away.

She winced and then moved forward, as if to lay her hand upon his arm, but Kent drew her aside, for Aveling's uneasiness was growing more acute. He plucked irritably at the robe he wore and cast appealing looks at Kent, murmuring incoherently the burden of his distress. Kent approached closer. The confused murmur resolved into intelligible sounds:

"The soldier — the Holy Temple — must wear——" The words died, but he continued to tear at his sleeve with a steady, imploring gaze that shaped his meaning.

Kent summoned Watson, who brought again the discarded robe of the Templar. Aveling's countenance lightened. When the exchange had been made, he sank into his chair with a sigh, and over his worn and ageing features crept the relief of a scourged and penitent soul.

Mrs. Aveling had not moved while these changes were taking place. But something of awe stole into her face as she looked down upon the quiescent figure in the chair, sinking further into the abysmal past. Terror seized her as she watched the man she loved fade into nothingness before the difficult approach of the guilty and

stricken lord of ancient Roxmoor. She started violently as Kent spoke:

“Do not be alarmed. The experience he is repeating has passed the period of Lady Aveling’s death. He will not know you again, for this is the beginning of the last change.”

The fascinated wonder of her look melted in a tender yearning as her resolution gathered once more to face that dreadful meeting of two persons in a single human soul!

CHAPTER XXXVI

UNVEILED

THE long day drew wearily to a close. The sky was heavily overcast. Kent opened a shutter to let in the last rays of daylight. Just at the horizon the clouds broke. Long, red rays reached out and touched Aveling's face. Something in him stirred. A flicker of light crossed his stony features, stained with the blood-red light. An ancient clock, which some one put in motion, struck off five wheezy strokes. Aveling thrilled at the sound and, after some feeble, groping movements, sank into his chair again, as if the sudden effort overtaxed him.

He did not move until the clock struck again. Then he showed acute signs of distress and seemed pressed to greater exertion. But he did not leave his chair, sinking into its hold, his eyes wide open in a calm scrutiny of the room.

It was evident that the striking of an hour was closely associated with something he wanted to do. As the hours moved on into the night, he made distressed attempts to leave his seat. But it was not until the stroke of nine that his pur-

pose woke, as if that hour were set to some past deed. Life and energy flowed into every limb. A dull joy, like a muffled light, sprang up in his face. He rose from his seat, threw up his hand in a triumphing gesture, and, with the proud bearing of the dead Lord Aveling, left the hall. He evidently had some definite goal in mind, for his actions were full of meaning and dramatic fire.

He passed with some haste through the corridors, pausing at an ancient doorway, worm-eaten and overspread with dust and cobwebs. It was his intention, apparently, to pass through, but it steadily resisted his efforts to open it. He stood back and thundered forth imperious commands. But no one could release the stiffened bolts or move the ponderous hinges. The ancient door, which, it began to be told in muttered whispers, had never been entered within the knowledge of man, still held firm. Every hand and voice lent its aid, for Aveling's desire to enter grew more urgent. His words took a threatening note.

A careful examination showed that the stout oaken fibre of the wood had been weakened by time and the iron bolts and hinges corroded by dampness. Working with heavy tools, inch by inch the door and frame were parted. The rusted hinges, eaten through, gave way. The door, with a sudden crash, fell in, disclosing a narrow rock-lined passage. Aveling sprang forward and van-

ished in the opening, followed by Kent and Dr. Warren.

A series of intricate, winding passages followed, mouldering and crumbled with age. The dampness trickled down in streams. The ceilings grew lower, the rock more roughly hewn. Here and there they passed the mouth of a yawning cavern, where another passage branched off from the path they followed.

After a time the character of the place began to change. Sculptured effigies of saints and crosses and sacred emblems appeared, which might denote the approach to a shrine. At one end Aveling stopped, with genuflections and a hastily muttered prayer, and then pushed on deeper into the recesses of the old foundations. Sometimes the narrow passage widened, or was broken by a niche, where a rude altar held the crucifix and a candlestick or lamp. Aveling, in his onward progress, came to a sudden halt. The passage apparently ended in a blank wall.

The group which accompanied him fell back. Aveling ran his eye over the rough stones. There was nothing to indicate that they were any different in structure from the wall lining the passage on either side. He moved forward and went through a series of movements, as one might recall a long-forgotten piece of music to the fingertips, touching the stones at various places. There

was a roar like thunder as the wall began to move. It was suddenly withdrawn, and Aveling stepped into the cavern that yawned before them.

They all pressed forward into the recess whither Aveling had so fearlessly advanced. He stood within a spacious chamber hewn in the solid rock. The flaring lights they carried fell upon arches overhead which sprang from carved pillars, supporting a beautifully decorated ceiling. The side walls were covered with frescoes. Directly in front stood an altar, richly ornamented. Upon it lay the emblems of a worship paid by a devout and anxious heart. To one side was placed an altar tomb, upon which lay the recumbent figure of a woman. Her features, severely classic, wore an expression of great sweetness and repose.

As Kent looked, the solitude and sanctity of the place—the sacred emblems, the carved slumber of the dead—seemed to re-create the long-past vigils which had vainly striven to still a tortured conscience. The frescoes were faded, the marble discolored, the lights extinct, the fittings of the altar falling in tattered ruin, and prayers had long ceased to echo here. But through the dilapidation that anguished cry of the soul still rang.

In Aveling that invisible despair was struggling back to life again. He knelt at the altar, he

prayed long and earnestly beside the marble image, but no lightening of his burden eased his soul. The melancholy of his bearing deepened. He sank at last in a broken heap beside the carven image.

Kent started hastily forward, but Dr. Warren stopped him, "I think he is better left undisturbed."

"He is dying!" urged Kent.

"No—not yet. But the long-delayed time is here. That terrible wrench of conscience has reached its crisis. See—he already stirs."

As Kent watched, with the agony of one bound hand and foot, he saw a returning flood of life alter the stricken frame beside the tomb. It seemed, insensibly, to become animate with a purpose that placed vigor within the drooped frame and re-lit the dying fire in his eye. With a glad shout, he rose and laid a gentle touch upon the marble cheek of her whose rest the centuries had not troubled. With that touch there flamed into life the resolution that grew by leaps and bounds within the man. Some vital act of self-surrender broke the barrier that lay between them. He cast a devouring look at her, offering again a worthy heart as he trampled underfoot the deed which had kept his soul in separation. He knelt and kissed the hem of her robe; he offered a triumphant prayer before the altar, and, springing

to his feet, plunged into the darkness that gaped at the chapel door.

Kent could scarcely follow the swift pace that carried Aveling away from the secret chapel, until they reached the corridor outside the ancient banqueting-hall, where Aveling paused. He stood for a moment irresolute. The silence was deadly. The clock struck ten! Only two hours remained, but hope was running high.

He stirred again, but clearly in confusion. He moved to the tapestried parlor, repeating fragments of bygone scenes. He knelt in supplication to the niched portrait and uttered piteous prayers. He turned again to the castle-hall and paced monotonously up and down, his hands clasped behind his back. His steady march carried him away to the row of curtainless windows, where he halted and stared up at the moon riding at peace in the deep-blue sky. The stately figure in the flowing robes was drawn sharply in black and silver. The touch of white upon his hair shone dimly, like a star.

The snarl of an angry wild beast suddenly ripped the air. Aveling had moved with terrible swiftness and torn open a recess concealed behind the panelling. It was empty!

Some sharp disappointment was upon him as he searched the farthest cranny of the recess. There were evidences of an effort to think that knotted

his frame and brought streams of moisture upon his brow. In a few moments he again moved with that incredible speed to another recess hid in the very jaws of the fire upon the hearth, only to fall back with a fresh cry of rage. Three, four, five times he opened sliding panels and hidden drawers, and each recess was empty. Each time he returned with redoubled fury to his task. The uneasy criminal had been ill-pleased with every hiding-place, and Aveling found his crooked trail with difficulty. His actions began to wear a malignant cunning, like one upon a stealthy hunt. He had crept away to prowl among the shadows that shrouded the southern end of the long apartment. His movements grew swifter, his step more crafty, his searching arms more sinuous and serpent-like. His eyes gleamed like balls of fire, and suddenly he seemed to melt from sight.

Mrs. Aveling sprang up with a sharp cry. She looked piteously from one white face to the other.

“Can no one find him? Is he gone forever?”

With one accord they turned to Kent, and for a moment he shouldered alone the burden of that night's tragedy. With short words he directed a search in Aveling's various haunts, but no trace of him was found. A clock nearby struck eleven. Kent ground his teeth. He sent some one to the little chapel underground. He himself kept guard

near the usual approach to the picture gallery. Minute by minute passed until a half-hour had gone. Kent moved restlessly away, and then returned. Some accursed timepiece, too cunningly contrived, struck the quarter before twelve. One seeker returned, and then another.

"What shall we do, Kent?" came the panic-stricken cry as they gathered round him, shrinking with terror. The few minutes that yet remained slipped silently into eternity.

Kent was staring helplessly ahead when a cry, like the piercing scream of a condor, rent the air. With an ashen face, he leaped forward in the direction of the gallery. In a few moments they all had gathered within the door. The candles they carried wrapped them in a pillar of light. Otherwise the room was dark, except for the red mist before the pictured Templar. In its faint radiance Aveling's form was just discernible.

The little group crept silently nearer. Aveling was painted on the shadows by the cloud of light that swept with them over the floor,—a stately, majestic figure, challenging his shadow upon the wall for the secret which had gripped his life. The vacillating Aveling was gone, and in his place stood a stern, accusing man facing his lower self,—its stains and defacements,—with an inexorable demand for the act of self-redemption.

Within the fastness of his soul the change was made. It poured out upon his face and figure, like the rising of full noon-tide upon a darkened day. He started,—straightened, every feature blazing beneath the transfiguration of the man. Those who watched saw a great illumination envelop the painted likeness on the wall whither Aveling's glance led theirs, and, as they looked, it assumed, to their tranced vision, the reality of flesh and movement. A great gladness surged out upon the dark face and swallowed its guilt and despair. It seemed a very man that leaned graciously toward the challenging figure on the floor, answering the demand made in every imperious line of him. Only a moment Aveling stood poised in that mysterious communion. Then he leaped forward to the niche beneath the picture. The door swung open, the whole aperture turned outward on a hinge. He thrust his hand into the vacant place, and then sprang backward. A bunch of papers gleamed white in the hand he held above his head.

But something was happening. Aveling staggered back against the wall, fighting horribly for breath. Kent was looking dumbly forward. His eyes were glassy and he seemed dazed. Mrs. Aveling clutched his arm.

“Quick—quick!” she urged. “You said you’d bring him back!”

With a mighty effort he moved, and, putting his lips to Aveling's ear, called in a hoarse voice: "Ned!—Aveling—come back, man! The fight is won!"

At the first sound of Kent's words the tempest in Aveling was stilled. He straightened and took a step forward, and, as they looked, the lines and mien of the Templar began to sink. And Aveling, aged and scarred by his struggle, strangely altered by his ancient garments, advanced from the shadows held in the glow of a great deliverance.

A clock somewhere struck twelve. Kent stumbled forward and fell upon the floor, a senseless heap.

When Kent woke, the sunshine streamed in a broad track across his chamber floor. He lay for a little while in the oblivion of a first wakening. The lees of a vivid dream dulled his senses. Everything was quiet, but the sense of stirring events was upon him and strange recollections began to haunt his mind. He raised himself upon his elbow to listen. The slight movement caused some one in a corner to stir, and he saw Watson advancing toward him. Kent watched him keenly for a confirmation of the memories crowding thick upon him. But Watson's face had learned well its lesson of sphinx-like calm. Kent checked the

questions which rose to his lips, and briefly gave assent to Watson's query whether he wished to rise.

As he emerged from his room a little later, a shadow seemed to tremble vaguely upon the wall and flit before him. The house seemed strangely still. There was no one in the Red Parlor where he waited, wondering, until a servant appeared to announce a meal, the name of which Kent failed to catch. His head was dull and heavy, and his limbs shook as he rose and passed out to the table. Something in the repressed silence of the servants annoyed him.

"Just what is this meal I am eating, pray?" he asked, by way of compelling those trained machines to talk.

"Oh, this is breakfast, sir," returned the respectful man behind his chair.

"And what day does it happen to be?" he enquired, after a moment's thought.

"This is Thursday, sir."

"And the day of the month?" Kent pursued.
"What might that be?"

"It is the second day of November," the man replied, in a lower voice.

Kent nodded. His head was growing clearer. It was plain that he had slept some thirty-four hours or more, for, as he glanced at a clock close

by, he saw that the hands stood near to ten o'clock. Now just what was going on? Had some disaster befallen Ned?

"Have Mr. and Mrs. Aveling gone out?" he asked sharply.

A nameless shadow flitted across the face before him. "I believe there is a letter for you—from Mr. Aveling, sir." The man coughed behind his hand and dropped his eyes.

Kent relapsed into silence and worked manfully at his breakfast. He remembered now that everything was all right before that blackness fell upon him, and his fears died down.

When he returned to the Red Parlor, Watson approached with a letter and a package of papers upon a tray, and, silently retiring, closed every door that led into the room. Kent watched the last door swing to, and then took up his letter. It bore no superscription. He tore it open. The envelope contained a single sheet, dated November first, eight o'clock, Melton Abbey. Kent spread it out and began to read:

"MY DEAR KENT:—I went in to-night to look at you, still sound asleep, and nearly twenty-four hours have passed since you fell to the floor in that deadly faint. I suppose you don't remember, but, after they roused you, you soon fell asleep. The doctors assure me it is a natural rest

that will be your salvation, and that you must be left until nature lets you waken. I always did hate self-forgetting people, and they tell me you scarcely shut an eye for three days and nights. But I mean to have it out with you, and *don't you forget it.*

“But, old man,—I can't stand this cursed house a minute longer. Something weighs me down like everlasting doom, and they tell me I must go. And so I am leaving to-night. Warren and Watson, faithful watch-dogs as they are, will guard you day and night and bring you to me when you are fit to travel. I brought a dozen or two of doctors along, so don't worry about *me*. And I sha'n't miss Watson, either; for I can't see over the army of valets and otherwise grouped about my noble person. This seems to be a densely populated world.

“You will find, by the examination of the accompanying papers, that Mariola inherits the Roxmoor estate. Bateson is to put her in possession whenever you leave, for you are to go to Melton Abbey as soon as you waken. Lady Melton is waiting eagerly to receive you. And Betty—I think—is waiting, too.”

Then followed a brief description of the papers found within the niche,—the missing will, a piece of old parchment, yellow and stained, but

still legible,—and a history of the crime carefully written by the conscience-stricken old lord, driven to make every expiation, except the only one that could avail. Mariola was the true heir according to these documents. Kent's only task was to see the Barotti family duly installed, and join the Avelings in Venice, whither they had gone to wait.

The letter fell from Kent's hand, striking the envelope which had enclosed it, carrying both to the floor. He stooped to pick them up, mechanically holding up the envelope to the light. Something more lay in it. He drew out a thin slip of paper, written hurriedly, as if under the pressure of another impulse.

“I often wonder, Kent, if I am I; or if I am only the soul of that old man incarnate, with the spell of his evil deeds upon me. Or, if through the dim ages, he has tugged ineffectually at all my predecessors. Or, perhaps, that kinship of the soul, symbolized by likeness of body, enabled his lost spirit to make the message clear. Ah! these are dangerous reveries! Who can penetrate these dim regions and tell us of them? Better—far better, to take the way, a step at a time, as we are bidden. But I long, with a thirst I hope you'll never share, for a Lethe draught——” The pen trailed out a few more indistinguishable

words, but Kent divined their meaning. For, when he looked up, the face of the Templar smiled down at him in the radiance of a new-born peace, and then dissolved into the shadows.

Kent got up and doggedly explored the corner where the vision had appeared. A dim old portrait lay concealed in a dark angle. He lit a match and held it up. The same face of an earlier date showed a benign countenance untroubled by the secret of his latter years. Again the portrait started forward. Kent turned and faced a blinding flood of sunshine playing through a window seldom opened. He looked no longer with contempt at his shaking hands, musing upon the alchemic spell which shadowed every corner of the manor, causing even the simplest of events to grow heavy with the mists of dread, and starting up the reminiscences of an age stained with a crime that made the dead past give up its dead.

Poor, thrice-haunted Aveling!

Kent went back to his chair and sat for a while, lost in profound thought. He roused himself at last and caught up the yellowed bundle of papers which accompanied the letter, a mass of material which carried the history of the Aveling family from the point where Kent had dropped it, down to modern times. For the next two hours he pored over the checkered story, fas-

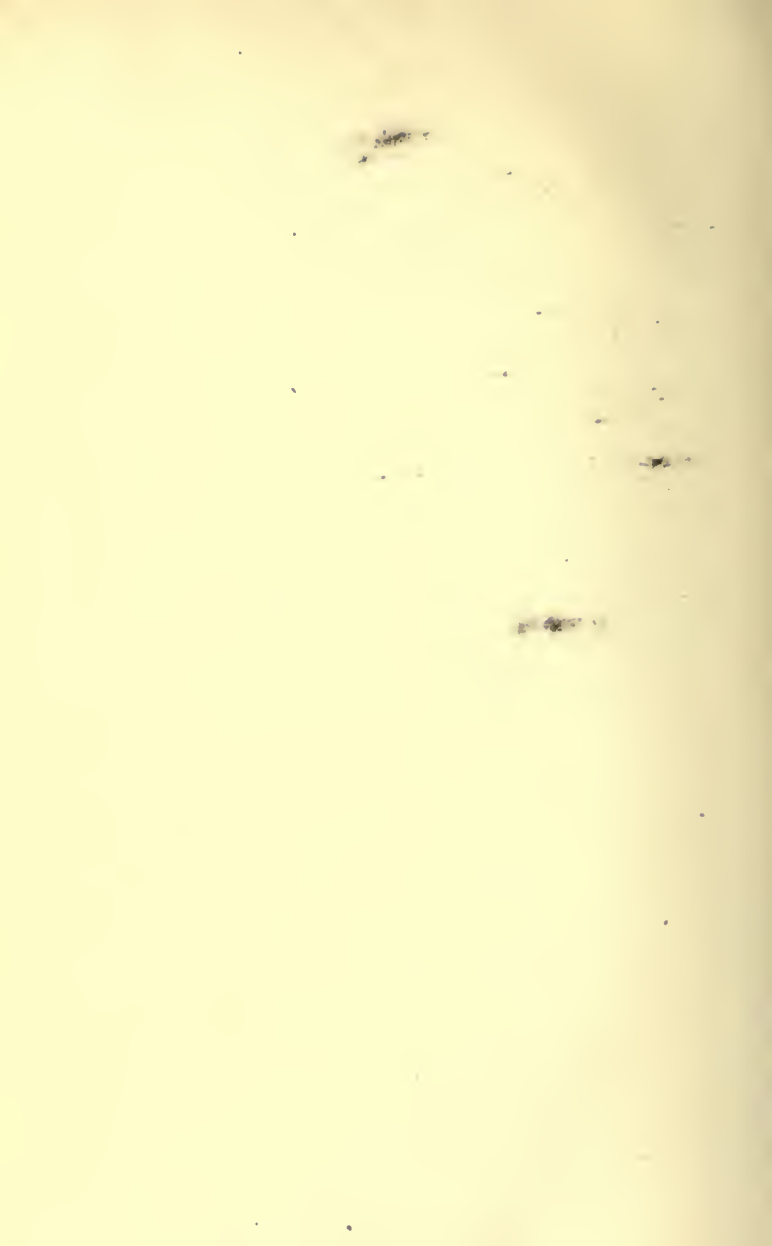
cinating as a fairy tale. How the family had declined, flaring up at intervals under the impulse of fresh blood injected into its ancient veins; or responding to the touch of passion, which, at stern and bloody times, evoked slumbering powers. How the title had lapsed during a period of fanatical religious fervor, never to be revived; and then the slow creeping on of that sinister fatality which piled up gold and treasure and drew a circle of blood about it.

He read over the quiet misery which escaped in the last few lines of Aveling's letter. His face grew dark and bitter, dwelling upon the pictured Templar, as he came and went beneath the ray of light. So many centuries to right one wrong; so many shadowed lines; and now the heavy price of Aveling's buoyant joy in living.

He ran once more over the words that somehow lingered—"Better to take the way, a step at a time, as we are bidden,"—and the soldierly, forward trend of the brave, fine words caused his thoughts to run out into a mood of grave wonder, with a fresh conviction of the necessity for the soul to receive and bear the discipline of human living, whether just or unjust. His memory reviewed with lightning clearness the night that Aveling, like a man going to be shot, pointed out his grim fate, and the quiet surrender to the obli-

gations of his blood which illumined the pale, familiar face drew Kent's bitterness away. For he knew that, through that terrible testing, this careless, laughing spirit had accomplished the human destiny and risen to the full stature of a spiritual man.

THE END



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